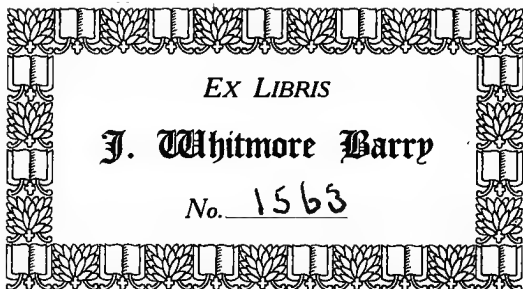


**FOUR
TRAGEDIES**

ALLAN MONKHOUSE



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FOUR TRAGEDIES

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BY

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

AUTHOR OF "DYING FIRES," "MARY
BROOME : A COMEDY," ETC.

LONDON
DUCKWORTH AND CO.
HENRIETTA ST. COVENT GARDEN
1913

A653772

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PRINTED AT
THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
LONDON

“Reaping the Whirlwind”, (a first essay in playwriting) has been acted by Miss Horniman’s company, and *“Resentment”* by Mr. Iden Payne’s. The two longer plays have not yet been acted.

“TO
C. E. MONTAGUE

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THE HAYLING FAMILY

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

GODFREY HAYLING
MRS. HAYLING
JOHN HAYLING
RHODA HAYLING
BOBBY HAYLING
FELIX BLAIR
DR. GRIMSTON
A MAID
A DETECTIVE

ACT I

The living-room at the Haylings'.

ACT II

The same. A year later.

ACT III

SCENE I. *A shabby room in another house. Nearly
three years have elapsed since the pre-
vious Act.*

SCENE II. *The same. Midnight.*

ACT I

The living-room at the Haylings'.

Time 11.30 p.m.

[As MRS. HAYLING enters there is a ring at the door bell below. She looks at the clock and then stands listening. In a few seconds GRIMSTON enters. He is a pleasant, middle-aged to elderly man of a subdued geniality.]

GRIMSTON. Yes, I know it's late.

[*They shake hands like old friends, but rather nervously.*]

MRS. HAYLING. What is it?

GRIMSTON. Where's Hayling?

MRS. HAYLING. He's not home yet. He telephoned to say he would be late.

GRIMSTON. He didn't say what was up?

MRS. HAYLING. No.

GRIMSTON. No. Well, and how are you?

MRS. HAYLING. I'm very well.

GRIMSTON. What's the good of saying that to a doctor?

MRS. HAYLING. Well, you asked me.

GRIMSTON. I didn't ask you to fib about it.

MRS. HAYLING. Oh! What is one to say? I'm all right. That isn't the point; that's nothing.

[Rather impatiently.]

GRIMSTON. Well, I'm not only a doctor; I'm ready to be consulted about anything, and I'm a sound, friendly creature. What is it?

MRS. HAYLING. You come here at midnight and you think I'm the one to give explanations.

GRIMSTON. Yes. Well—you are, really. I want all sorts of explanations from you. We're old friends, aren't we, and we haven't had an intimate word for years?

MRS. HAYLING. What's the good of talking?

GRIMSTON. I believe in talking when you want to get at things. I'm not a woman and I distrust intuitions; I'm a doctor and I know how often diagnosis is wrong with children who can't explain.

MRS. HAYLING. How can I talk to you?

GRIMSTON. Yes, I know your difficulty; but when you refused me—is it thirty years ago?—how old is John?—we went through an honoured formula. We were to be friends. And we meant it. I've not forgotten that. We meant it. You'll forgive my reminding you.

MRS. HAYLING. And we've been friends.

GRIMSTON. I know. We've been friends deep down. But I think it's superficial things that matter—seeing you now and then—and your children.

MRS. HAYLING. You mean those are not superficial things?

GRIMSTON. That's it. That's what I mean.

MRS. HAYLING. You have always been welcome.

GRIMSTON. I've been welcomed, anyhow. Yes. But you didn't want me—— Where are the young people?

MRS. HAYLING. They've all gone to the theatre. Felix Blair, too. They should be here directly.

GRIMSTON. Felix Blair. Yes. Well, now, am I indiscreet if I ask whether Rhoda and he are engaged?

MRS. HAYLING. They've never told me so.

GRIMSTON. And I suppose they would?

MRS. HAYLING. I don't know. Do modern children?

GRIMSTON. [*Shakes his finger at her.*] Now, they're not bad children.

MRS. HAYLING. [*Listlessly.*] Oh, no. It's the parents' fault. We don't keep up with them. [*Suddenly.*] What have you come for?

GRIMSTON. Where did you say he's gone?

MRS. HAYLING. Who?

GRIMSTON. Your husband.

MRS. HAYLING. I told you I didn't know. What is it?

GRIMSTON. I've been at a dinner—semi-public affair. I heard something that might interest him.

MRS. HAYLING. And why so late?

GRIMSTON. Well, I was passing——

MRS. HAYLING. Nonsense. This isn't on the way from anywhere.

GRIMSTON. Is he—well?

MRS. HAYLING. Oh! why so roundabout? Are you afraid of startling me or of hurting me? It

won't be easy. I don't seem to care enough to be hurt.

GRIMSTON. Oh! come! It's not as bad as that.

MRS. HAYLING. It is one moment; and then I'm all angry and trembling. You see, I tell you this now. I don't know why. It's late and the house is still, and presently they'll all be here and the chance gone. I suppose I want to talk to you. I've forgotten how; I'm stiff and shy. Shy! Can you believe it? After all these years—but you've got something to say.

GRIMSTON. I'm not sure that it matters much, or that you don't know more about it than I do. Does your husband tell you about his affairs?

MRS. HAYLING. I'd rather not begin to talk about my husband.

GRIMSTON. This is just a question of fact.

MRS. HAYLING. Do you understand there are all kinds of things that I've thought and felt but never said? It isn't that I don't trust you and don't want you. I don't know what I know or what I think. But to say things—I'm afraid of what I should say.

GRIMSTON. I could discount what you say.

MRS. HAYLING. Discount! What's that?

GRIMSTON. It's a business term. Take something off.

MRS. HAYLING. You might take too much off. You might have to put something on. How absurdly I beat about the bush. My husband and I are good friends. I have never broken with him; I've hardly quarrelled with him. Well, what is it? The twain

are one flesh, you know. You wanted to speak to him. ' Speak to me.

GRIMSTON. Talking of business terms, does he tell you about his business affairs?

MRS. HAYLING. Never.

GRIMSTON. You know nothing about them?

MRS. HAYLING. I know that we're in debt and that my money has been keeping the house going.

GRIMSTON. It's as bad as that?

MRS. HAYLING. Pretty bad, I should think.

GRIMSTON. Well, I came about that. His firm is talked about.

MRS. HAYLING. Talked about?

GRIMSTON. Their credit's gone, I'm afraid. I suppose he knows what people are saying, but I thought I might warn him. And I was wondering how your money is held and the children's. I'm an old friend. He was never a business man really—too flighty altogether.

MRS. HAYLING. I don't like talking to you about it. He's very astute; he finds things out. I'm cowardly towards him, but I'm most afraid of the day when I won't be.

GRIMSTON. There's nothing to find out. I should say all this to him.

MRS. HAYLING. I don't like it. I've been loyal to him—at least I like to believe so. Oh! I know I'm only sticking to forms. But how can you be loyal any other way? I can't help my thoughts. I've kept my marriage vows—as well as I could. I've honoured him. I must have something to stick to, don't you

see? I'm a great person for forms; I go to church twice every Sunday.

GRIMSTON. That's a consolation?

MRS. HAYLING. It's a habit. But I read the Bible at home—the Old Testament.

GRIMSTON. Why the Old Testament?

MRS. HAYLING. It suits me best.

GRIMSTON. Why?

MRS. HAYLING. I like those savage people who would not endure things. I like the killing.

GRIMSTON. You're a queer woman.

MRS. HAYLING. [*Looks at the clock.*] It's time they were here.

GRIMSTON. Ah! the children. You have the children.

MRS. HAYLING. Then you think it's enough if a mother sees them? She needn't know them?

GRIMSTON. I don't say that. But if you don't know them who does?

MRS. HAYLING. There they are, I think.

[*The sound of voices, cheerful and eager, comes nearer. Enter rapidly in the following order, RHODA, FELIX BLAIR, BOBBY, JOHN. Evening dress, the girl loosely cloaked, BLAIR with his overcoat on. They stream in like an irruption and disperse quickly about the room. All greet GRIMSTON and MRS. HAYLING, BLAIR more formally than the others. The scene is now played rapidly, with overlapping talk. After the how-d'ye-dos:*

RHODA. Oh, Felix, take your coat off.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes, do, Felix.

BOBBY. Come on, old boy.

[*Tries to strip it off him. FELIX resists.*
Laughter. They are all round him in a
gentle scrimmage.

BLAIR. I can't stop. I mustn't stop.

RHODA. You always want not to do things.

BOBBY. It's bourgeois. It's beastly bourgeois.

JOHN. Nonsense, Felix! We've not half discussed it. We're full of argument, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. Save us. [*They get BLAIR's coat off.*

BOBBY. [*At side table, bawling.*] Sandwiches and things. Come along. Have some, mother? Dr. Grimston?

MRS. HAYLING. Give me some water, Bobby.

[*John gets to it first and brings it.*

GRIMSTON. Really, do you know, I think I will, though I have been dining no end. How jolly you all look, hegad!

MRS. HAYLING. [*Gently.*] Not a care in the world.

[*They eat sandwiches, etc., about the room. Some*
take claret, RHODA water, GRIMSTON whisky
and soda, etc.

JOHN. [*Quietly to his mother.*] He's not home?

[*MRS. HAYLING shakes her head.*

JOHN. Any message?

MRS. HAYLING. He telephoned to say he'd be late.

GRIMSTON. Well, and where've you been? What's the play?

RHODA. "The Offending Eye."

GRIMSTON. Ah! Romantic affair?

CHORUS. No—oh, no—not a hit. Very much otherwise.

BOBBY. It's about family life, you know, and the absurdity of it.

JOHN. Oh, no! Come, Bobby.

BLAIR. Bobby's not far away.

RHODA. Yes, Felix, he is.

BLAIR. It's rather rot. } *Together.*

BOBBY. Fine stuff it is. }

GRIMSTON. What? what?

BLAIR. Rot. It's rot.

BOBBY. Fine stuff.

JOHN. It's not so bad.

RHODA. I liked it.

BLAIR. Ideas, of course. Always ideas nowadays.

BOBBY. Never mind. You'll get used to them.

GRIMSTON. But whose is it? It's not Shaw?

JOHN. Would you call him an understudy of Shaw's, Bobby?

BOBBY. [*Sententiously.*] Bernard Shaw is a destructive force.

GRIMSTON. And what's this fellow?

BOBBY. He's essentially reconstructive.

RHODA. He wants to purify the family.

JOHN. To make every member of it justify himself or—— [*He looks at his mother and stops.*]

GRIMSTON. But—good gracious!—where does the fun come in? And are we all to justify ourselves? Mayn't we grow old and have a few privileges?

BLAIR. It's rather hard to explain the hang of the

thing, Dr. Grimston. It's all hopelessly unpractical. [*Protests from the others. He waves them aside.*] Well, it's something like this: Here's a case——

BOBBY. Let me tell him. Let me state it. You're out of sympathy——

JOHN. Shut up, Bobby.

BOBBY. But he says it's footling——

BLAIR. Here's a case——

RHODA. Let Bobby. Bobby's so funny.

BOBBY. I'm not funny. Not unintentionally, I mean.

JOHN. Now, Felix.

BLAIR. Go on then, Bobby. } *Together.*

BOBBY. Well, it's like this, Dr. Grimston. Here's a family, you know. They insist a good deal on the family and the tradition of it and all that. And the eldest son, you see, he's rather a rotter and he humbugs them, and as the years go on he has wormed himself in——

BLAIR. Wormed himself in!

RHODA. Quite right. Go on, Bobby.

BLAIR. How can a fellow worm himself into his own family?

BOBBY. [*With calm emphasis.*] Wormed himself in. And he makes everything wrong; he spoils everything, you know—takes the edge off. He's not their sort and they're staunch, you know. Well, he makes a regular mucker of it at last, but he wants to hang on because—well, there's money in it, of course, and he wants to seem respectable. They have a kind of confab, and he comes it strong about the family—a plausible beggar. Now what should they do?

GRIMSTON. The case is too vague, Bobby. I must cross-examine the witnesses.

BOBBY. I've not put it well, but there was Felix trying to look as if he could do it better.

RHODA. He's not the prodigal son; he's a kind of foreigner; he doesn't belong.

JOHN. It's a question of fraternity and generosity. Must they all handicap themselves to help him?

GRIMSTON. Well, well. Never mind.

[He looks at MRS. HAYLING.]

JOHN. They all throw him over.

BLAIR. That's the modern selfishness.

GRIMSTON. *[Rather testily.]* It depends on the case.

JOHN. And I think they're all going to be miserable about it.

RHODA. Do you think they'll take him back?

JOHN. Wasn't that indicated?

BOBBY. No—No——

RHODA. I thought so. } *Together.*

JOHN. *[Follows GRIMSTON'S glance at his mother, who sits stonily.]* Jolly good house.

RHODA. It's making quite a stir.

[She goes to sit beside her mother.]

BOBBY. And we agreed that they did right, except Felix, who——

BLAIR. Who's a foreigner himself.

JOHN. He's a clever man. They can't get away from Shaw, though.

BOBBY. Yes, but Shaw's a destructive force.

RHODA. Go it, Bobby!

BLAIR. I think you ought to hear the minority report on this play.

RHODA. No, Felix.

[*Aside to him.*]

GRIMSTON. I think I'll be off, before you quite bewilder me. [*He shakes hands with MRS. HAYLING, who, however, rises and accompanies him without speaking.*] Good night, young people.

[*He nods and waves to them.* GRIMSTON and MRS. HAYLING go out.]

BOBBY. Something's up.

BLAIR. [*To RHODA.*] I'm afraid your mother's not well.

RHODA. What is it, John?

JOHN. Felix is one of us.

RHODA. No.

BLAIR. What! Rhoda?

RHODA. Oh! tell him anything. That's all right.

BLAIR. But, Rhoda——

JOHN. Like most respectable families, Felix, we have a skeleton in the cupboard. You know us as a united family and we don't quite admit even to ourselves that we are not. But if you are going to marry into the family——

RHODA. But is he?

BOBBY. I say!

BLAIR. Rhoda!

RHODA. I don't think Felix will ever marry me.

JOHN. Aren't you engaged? I supposed——

BLAIR. Of course, I understand that Rhoda is not bound to me, but—well, I'm bound. I had hoped——

RHODA. You know how it is with the servant-girls. They and their young men are walking out and then they are keeping company and then—Felix and I have been walking out, but—no, I don't think—we haven't time for this now.

BLAIR. You wish me to go?

RHODA. Oh, no!

BOBBY. Stay as a friend.

RHODA. I want you to stay, Felix.

JOHN. Well, Felix, anyhow, it's about my father. We're not in touch with him, you know.

BLAIR. Is there some particular point now?

JOHN. Didn't you see, Bobby, that this talk about the play was getting on mother's nerves? He's the outsider here.

BOBBY. I see; want of tact. I wouldn't have minded so much before him.

RHODA. John, you used to admire father. You used to say he wasn't so wretchedly domestic as other people.

JOHN. I've tried to admire him. I've done my best.

BLAIR. Every family's got something wrong, and if Mr. Hayling doesn't bother you— He must be a very clever man. There he is at the head of a great concern and yet you'd never take him for a business man. I suppose he's been a great success socially as well as in business.

JOHN. What do you know about his business success?

BOBBY. Why, Jack!

JOHN. Do you know that we owe a frightful lot of tradesmen's bills?

BLAIR. The devil!

RHODA. But, John — I know they got behind. Mother is careless about them. She says she's careless. And then there's all her money.

JOHN. I wonder how much of it is left.

BOBBY. I say!

JOHN. Why was old Grimston here to-night?

BOBBY. I was wondering that.

JOHN. He's got something on his mind.

RHODA. Mother is anxious. I wonder where father is.

BLAIR. [*To JOHN.*] What do you know?

JOHN. The firm's what they call "talked about."

BLAIR. Has your father told you about it?

JOHN. Oh, no. He waves us off.

[Illustrative action.]

BLAIR. Look here! It's not my business, but it seems to me that you're rather innocent young things. How's your own money? How's that fixed? [*He laughs.*] I've a mercenary interest in Rhoda. Yes, I have, Rhoda.

JOHN. It comes from our grandmother—mother's mother, you know. It was vested in trustees. Bobby can't touch his till he's of age. Let's see, how long, Bobby? Your birthday——

BOBBY. Nearly a year.

JOHN. Yes. Ours—Rhoda's and mine—is under our control now. It's still where our trustees put it.

RHODA. John, do you think that mother's money is gone?

JOHN. Some of it, certainly.

RHODA. We shall have to go into a skimpy little house and all that kind of thing. Bobby, you'll have to keep us.

BLAIR. Why will he?

RHODA. His money's all right.

BLAIR. So is yours.

RHODA. Oh, yes.

BOBBY. She means that father'll get it.

BLAIR. Oh, but—— } *Together.*

JOHN. Shut up, Bobby.

BLAIR. Why should he get it? You're queer people. Do you mean to say that if the business is rotten you'll let him have your money?

JOHN. No, I want what I've got. I don't mean just to become a general practitioner. I'll have to keep myself for years. There's no money in research. And Rhoda must have her *dot*. You'll find us reasonably selfish all right.

BOBBY. He'll get your money.

RHODA. For shame, Bobby.

BOBBY. You know he will.

JOHN. We know nothing of the kind.

RHODA. And we might want to give it.

JOHN. Anyhow, Bobby will support us in comparative affluence.

RHODA. [*As BLAIR goes for his coat.*] Have something more, Felix. Have a macaroon.

BLAIR. No, thanks; but I'll have a drop of claret before I go.

JOHN. Let's all have a little claret. Let's drink to

our benefactor, our supporter. Bobby. [*He gives RHODA a glass.*] Here's to Bobby—our benefactor!

[*Enter HAYLING, behind.*]

ALL THREE. Bobby, our benefactor.

BOBBY. Oh, rot!

[*A sudden stillness when they see HAYLING.*]

HAYLING. [*Quietly.*] What's all this? What have you been doing, Bobby? Ah, Felix, my boy! [*BLAIR advances and shakes hands.*] Come, don't let me be a killjoy. This silence is oppressive; it's exclusive. It's bad manners, surely. What's the joke, Bob?

BOBBY. Oh, it's nothing, sir. They were only rotting me.

JOHN. You're late, sir.

HAYLING. I'm late. Yes. Where's your mother? I heard your voices, and came in here. Your voices promised more than I got.

RHODA. She went out of the room a few minutes ago with Dr. Grimston.

HAYLING. Grimston?

BLAIR. I was just going, sir. I must be off.

HAYLING. No hurry, Blair. What have you all been doing?

RHODA. We've been to the theatre.

JOHN. To the Court. A piece called "The Offending Eye."

HAYLING. [*More genially.*] Well, Felix, won't you just give me the scenario before you go?

BLAIR. Now, Bobby. You're the one for that.

BOBBY. Rot!

HAYLING. Really, for a son of mine, your diction, Bobby, is— What was the play about, Rhoda?

RHODA. Oh, it's the modern kind of thing, ironical and inconclusive, of course, and you don't quite know where you are.

HAYLING. Do you think me too stupid to understand, or is there something to conceal?

JOHN. The play's about a family with an unworthy member. It's a problem what to do with him.

HAYLING. An unworthy member?

JOHN. It's a question how far the common family spirit shall shelter and protect him.

HAYLING. And what do they do?

JOHN. There comes a breaking-point; they are all implacable.

HAYLING. Charming subject for a play.

JOHN. It's not a pleasant play.

HAYLING. And what becomes of the—father?

JOHN. It's the eldest son. He's thrust into the outer darkness.

BLAIR. Just where I must be going. Good night, Mr. Hayling; good night everybody.

[He kisses RHODA's hand; he speaks to her in a low voice, and she shakes her head. He goes.]

RHODA. Here's some claret, father, and sandwiches.

HAYLING. Nothing.

RHODA. You've dined, I suppose? Won't you have something? It must be a long time ago.

HAYLING. I suppose I dined in some fashion.

RHODA. Well, good night everybody.

BOBBY. I'm off, too.

HAYLING. Stay. I wish to speak to you. Be seated, Rhoda. [*She sits down.*] My children, I occupy a strange position to-night. I come before you with an explanation and—shall I say—a confession? Well, a confession, an apology. I have never before asked for your sympathy. Now, in the hour of difficulty—of failure—a temporary, a momentary failure it may be—perhaps that rests with you. [BOBBY *fidgets and turns to look at JOHN, who remains gravely attentive.*] Well, I humble myself. I have been, I hope, a sympathetic—perhaps an indulgent—father, though of late years—I make no claims.

JOHN. We are sorry, sir, to understand that you are in trouble.

HAYLING. In trouble. Yes. The phrase is a good homely one. In trouble.

RHODA. What is it, father?

JOHN. Your business, I fear——

HAYLING. [*Paces about rather melodramatically.*] Ah! an imaginative man has no place in business. He sees too many possibilities, too many opportunities. Of course you may say there is romance. The merchant with his richly freighted argosies—what is it, Bobby? One of our poets has something to that effect. Nowadays, the only refuge for a trader of any imagination is the Stock Exchange.

JOHN. But your business has nothing to do with the Stock Exchange.

HAYLING. Not directly. No. I need not go into details. I have had losses—considerable losses. My

business is sound—essentially. More capital is required. A temporary tightness of money. Is it possible to weather the storm? You have the right to ask that, and I reply: With moderate financial accommodation—yes.

JOHN. Your difficulties are due to exceptional causes?

HAYLING. Exceptional. Call it so, call it so.

JOHN. Are the liabilities what you call trade debts?

HAYLING. Understand, my boy, that such questions probe me cruelly. Perhaps I am too sensitive. You cannot wish to humiliate me. There may have been misjudgment, even indiscretions. It's a long story. I cannot detach a small portion of my life for your inspection. To explain everything—to give you everything—[*with a grand gesture*—it's an epic. [*With more modulation*] Every man's life is an epic.

JOHN. I merely want to know your position.

[HAYLING passes his hand wearily over his face and sits down.]

RHODA. Father's tired. Don't bother him now.

JOHN. Shall we discuss the thing in the morning, sir?

HAYLING. No—no. What have you there? Is there any champagne?

BOBBY. Only claret.

HAYLING. [*Becoming human suddenly.*] I need champagne for this job.

BOBBY. [*Looking at JOHN.*] Shall I——

HAYLING. Give me some claret. Let's get on.

[BOBBY pours claret into a tumbler and gives it to HAYLING, who drinks and sits down.] The position is, briefly, that I must have a certain amount of money at once to meet my engagements.

JOHN. [After a short pause.] And you have difficulty in obtaining that?

HAYLING. During the last forty-eight hours I have explored every possibility.

RHODA. Won't any of your business friends help you, father?

HAYLING. I'm afraid I can hardly explain the position to you, Rhoda.

RHODA. If you explain it to John, perhaps I shall understand.

JOHN. Do you see any way out, sir?

HAYLING. There is one.

JOHN. [After a pause.] And that is——

HAYLING. If you don't see it—if it is not self-evident—why, then, I suppose there is no way out.

JOHN. We don't want to make things difficult for you. You suggest that I, or Rhoda and I, should lend you money. Of course Bobby can't.

HAYLING. If you came to me as I could conceive children coming to a father, freely and generously—you don't suppose that your money would be squandered! You would be paid a reasonable—nay, a generous rate of interest. The investment is a perfectly sound one. I make no claim. [A pause.] You meet me, I must say, somewhat unsympathetically. The money is yours. I make no claim. I will say

nothing about obligations owed to me, about years of devotion.

BOBBY. Devotion !

JOHN. Shut up ! Bobby.

HAYLING. Devotion—yes, sir, devotion to your interests. Do you suppose that I have remained a man of business by choice ?

JOHN. Take it that we are anxious to help you if we can—well—if we can with a reasonable consideration for our own interests. Take my case : If I were to lose this money I should have to give up all chance of being anything but a general practitioner—and Rhoda—we can't risk Rhoda's money. It wouldn't be right ; we must be selfish.

HAYLING. The new doctrine !

JOHN. But what kind of a world will your unselfish people make of it ?

BOBBY. Stick to the point, Jack.

HAYLING. I offer you an investment. Let us leave it at that.

JOHN. Well, sir, I'm forced to put it to you like this. You understand these things better than I do ; but can't any sound business concern get support from the banks—overdrafts and that kind of thing ? Why can't you ? If there's no risk, why can't you ?

HAYLING. You don't understand the contraction of credit—the banks, of course, have their cut and dried rules. Do you suppose that I should have come to you if accommodation could be obtained elsewhere ? I borrow, if I do borrow, on my personal guarantee.

JOHN. I understand that there must be a serious risk.

HAYLING. A formal risk. An infinitesimal risk.

JOHN. Make that clear, and what I have is at your service.

HAYLING. The business is an old and sound one, and its prospects are excellent.

JOHN. Yet it has been losing money.

HAYLING. I see that you are determined not to spare me. Let my humiliation be complete. I had intended to enrich you all. Call it speculation. And since my partner, Amhurst, died the business has lacked capital. No doubt he was a restraining influence on me—my temperament is not easily confined to mere routine. But I have—shall I say?—learnt my lesson. I am learning it now. Your manner, my dear John, reminds me of my old tutor; he was a logical person whom we all hated. Well, I lost my money in speculative investments. I hope you relish the confession.

BOBBY. And mother's money?

RHODA. Hush, Bobby.

[MRS. HAYLING *enters*.

MRS. HAYLING. Godfrey! I didn't know you had come home.

HAYLING. I must apologize for not seeking you at once. I heard voices here and came in. I was detained by a most interesting discussion. You've had Grimston here.

MRS. HAYLING. He has gone.

HAYLING. Perhaps it would be more delicate to

defer our discussion; it might be painful to your mother.

JOHN. We must all know the truth.

HAYLING. Janet, I stand here a mark for the accusations of my children. They accuse me—they are ready to accuse me—of I don't know what. Bobby is irresponsible, of course. [*To JOHN.*] Do you ask me to account for your mother's fortune?

JOHN. Isn't it better that we should know everything?

HAYLING. Janet, perhaps you can tell them that your money was freely advanced, at various times, for investment in the business?

MRS. HAYLING. That is so.

RHODA. Is it lost, father?

HAYLING. I have tried to spare your mother all anxiety, but now it must be recognized, Janet, that the money you have advanced is—deeply engaged.

BOBBY. It's lost.

HAYLING. Silence, sir. If I cannot obtain assistance it may be lost. Anything may happen. The bankruptcy of an old and honourable firm—my own disgrace. And if we can get past this corner we are safe; your mother's money will be safe. I do not plead for myself; I might do so for her. I cannot expect that you, with your logical methods and your modern notions of enlightened selfishness, will spare her. I have much to reproach myself with, but never, I hope, with meanness—never with a failure in generosity.

JOHN. If we knew that risking our money would be likely to save hers our decision might be easy.

HAYLING. If my assurance, my personal assurance——

JOHN. Your assurance, sir, is your belief. We don't doubt that. Could you take me into your confidence about the details of the business—let me see how you stand?

HAYLING. You are not a trained accountant.

JOHN. Then let us have an accountant's report.

HAYLING. It's impossible; there's no time for it.

MRS. HAYLING. Oh, never mind my money. I shall never want it. Can't you take it all and put things straight?

BOBBY. It's gone.

JOHN. When must a decision be made?

HAYLING. Immediately.

JOHN. You see we are all in the dark. Mother, we want to help you—and to help father, but if things are hopeless why should we throw our money after the rest?

HAYLING. Some children would have thought only of their father's honour—of the moral obligation to the family—the honourable tradition.

JOHN. Well, we are not like that. To save your face is not to save your honour.

BOBBY. We have no duty toward your creditors.

RHODA. Hush, Bobby.

HAYLING. Yes, yes, I know. There is no family obligation now. The family must go with the rest. The family is doomed.

JOHN. Nonsense, sir.

RHODA. We do feel about the family, father. You don't understand.

HAYLING. Who is the head of it?

BOBBY. John.

HAYLING. What!

JOHN. Damn you, Bobby. } *Together.*

BOBBY. I say what I mean.

HAYLING. You mean something? It's not a perfectly meaningless insult? And your mother sits there.

BOBBY. I forgot you, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes, it's all very strange.

RHODA. You shall have my money, father.

JOHN. Stop! When must we decide?

HAYLING. I must have the positive assurance by to-morrow if it is to be any use.

JOHN. We must talk it over, then.

HAYLING. Who?

JOHN. Rhoda and Bobby and I.

HAYLING. Bobby?

JOHN. Oh, yes—Bobby.

HAYLING. You regard Bobby as the head of the family, perhaps?

JOHN. [*Pleasantly.*] He's a young jackass, of course, but he's in at this.

HAYLING. I am to wait outside while you come to a decision?

JOHN. Not at all, sir; we'll go to the dining-room.

[*The three young people stand together, prepared to go.* HAYLING glares at them.]

HAYLING. Keep your money. Batten on your money. I'll have none of it.

MRS. HAYLING. Oh, Godfrey!

JOHN. We are trying to be reasonable, sir. We want to be considerate.

HAYLING. Reasonable! Considerate! I'm your father.

JOHN. We have not forgotten that.

MRS. HAYLING. But we must all be reasonable, Godfrey.

HAYLING. You, too.

MRS. HAYLING. Oh, what's coming upon us? It was only a pretence that all was well, but that was better than this.

RHODA. Mother, dear——

MRS. HAYLING. A new spirit has come to you.

HAYLING. Yes. "Honour thy father and thy mother" is a little out of date,

JOHN. We will honour you, sir, as far as you are honourable.

HAYLING. You think I'm dependent on you and so you may revolt.

JOHN. The revolt was accomplished long ago.

MRS. HAYLING. Ah! yes. We lost them long ago.

RHODA. No, mother. } *Together.*

BOBBY. Not you.

MRS. HAYLING. I'm not one of you now. I'm as far away from you as he is. It's strange to hear your father spoken to like this.

HAYLING. I'm down. I'm in trouble. No more to be got out of me.

MRS. HAYLING. That's unfair, Godfrey. That's unfair.

HAYLING. You side with them.

MRS. HAYLING. Oh, misery! what has come upon us? How can I side with them or with you?

JOHN. Mother, there's no need to take any side. Let us get to the practical question.

MRS. HAYLING. I can't see that that matters. It's this terrible change that's come upon us.

JOHN. There's no change, mother. We're just as we were.

MRS. HAYLING. But the things that have been said——

JOHN. Oh, yes. Things have been said.

MRS. HAYLING. And they were never said before.

JOHN. A good deal crumbles away in the course of years. We can't keep it by pretending that it's there.

HAYLING. A few homely virtues seem to have crumbled away.

JOHN. Good heavens, sir! We don't stand where we did. We are not children.

MRS. HAYLING. You are children to me.

BOBBY. That's true.

HAYLING. Well, let us bow to facts. I've no legal control over you, and I dare say I'm mentally inferior and morally culpable. I have made a business proposal to you. Accept it or reject it as you please.

[*He stalks out. MRS. HAYLING hesitates and follows him.*]

MRS. HAYLING. [*At the door.*] Be merciful.

[BOBBY goes to see that the door is shut, then comes back to the others.

BOBBY. Do you know what I feel more than anything else? I shall never kiss him again when I say good night. It was absurd for me to have to do it. How did you get out of it, Jack? After all, I'm a man. It was hateful. It made me feel a kind of Judas. I won't do it again.

JOHN. I feel so frightfully sorry for him—except when he irritates me.

BOBBY. For him?

JOHN. It's worse for him than for anybody.

BOBBY. But it's his fault.

RHODA. You didn't pity the outcast in the play.

JOHN. It was in a play; it was all ideas. It isn't a matter of judgments; it's what you feel.

RHODA. Yes, yes, John.

JOHN. He belongs to us now more than he did; he's coming into the family again.

BOBBY. Look here! You'd better buck up and talk business. Your money's as good as gone if you let him have it. You've got to look after yourselves. I'm all right, it seems; my money's safe and I can advise you dispassionately. You're fools if you let it go. Where's all that selfishness you were boasting about? What's the good of my taking you to modern plays? You agree all right; you get the notion; and then you come home and act like early Victorian children—or would if I wasn't here.

JOHN. Rhoda must stick to hers.

RHODA. I won't if you don't to yours ; and anyhow, that mayn't be enough.

BOBBY. I think Felix ought to be consulted.

RHODA. No, Bobby. He has nothing to do with it.

BOBBY. But aren't you going to marry him ?

RHODA. Not now.

BOBBY. But what do you mean ? Felix is never a fellow to back out because——

RHODA. Of course he isn't. He would let me marry him, of course, but he wouldn't like all this.

JOHN. All what ?

RHODA. Oh ! All this upset and wretchedness and loss of respectability.

JOHN. But it's not here yet.

RHODA. It's coming.

BOBBY. Really, Rhoda, you shock me. You take these—sacred obligations very lightly.

RHODA. Felix doesn't like it, I can see. He's a gentleman ; he would go through with it. It's not a great tragedy for me ; *I'm* disappointed most in myself. But I know he would be miserable. [*Passionately.*] Oh, it's a trifle. I haven't time for it. I can't bother with Felix now.

BOBBY. I'm dashed if I know what you mean.

JOHN. Well, let that rest a little.

BOBBY. Yes, we really haven't time for any side-shows. But Rhoda makes me feel that we may all be cracked. I don't think I understand women. Now, come ! To the point. Let us have a dispassionate examination of pros and cons. Now——

JOHN. Bobby in the chair.

BOBBY. [*Sternly.*] John, this is not a time for foolery.

JOHN. Oh, it's too serious to be serious about it. Don't you see that we know nothing? We have to decide and we know nothing. What becomes of our money? Who are the creditors? Does it do them any good? Is anyone clothed and fed who wouldn't be? There's a lot of figuring on paper and making out of cheques and things, but what's the upshot? Decide? It was decided long ago. We haven't any will in the matter.

BOBBY. You don't seem half as clear as when you cross-examined the governor. I thought that masterly.

JOHN. Oh, nonsense.

RHODA. But your work, John? The career that your money was to help you to? It doesn't matter for me.

JOHN. Do you know, Rhoda, I feel that I should botch things if I stuck to this money now?

RHODA. Why?

JOHN. Well, if there was a taint of shabbiness or selfishness about it I think I couldn't get on. And think of failing when you knew that you had lost a chance of doing something that's better than success, perhaps.

RHODA. That's weak, John. You've only to keep on doing the best you can.

JOHN. I know it's weak. I am weak.

BOBBY. Why! We all depend on you.

JOHN. That's what ought to support me.

RHODA. Hark! There's mother stirring. Ask mother if she thinks you weak.

JOHN. It's not difficult to do what's expected of you.

BOBBY. What does mother expect?

JOHN. Or what does she want?

BOBBY. Are they both coming back?

RHODA. Hush!

[MRS. HAYLING *enters*.

MRS. HAYLING. I have persuaded your father to go to bed.

RHODA. And we must persuade you to do the same.

MRS. HAYLING. What have you decided?

JOHN. Can you tell us how you stand in this business, mother? Did you lend your money? Would you be a creditor?

MRS. HAYLING. I'm sure I don't know, my dear. I've signed a lot of papers.

JOHN. I believe we shall do whatever you wish.

MRS. HAYLING. [*After a pause.*] Then I must advise you not to lend it.

JOHN. I didn't say what you advised; I said what you wished.

RHODA. We wish the same, mother. We want father to have it.

JOHN. He must leave Rhoda something.

MRS. HAYLING. You'll be more bitter than ever to him if he loses this.

JOHN. I don't think we are bitter.

BOBBY. Certainly not.

MRS. HAYLING. Oh, you are good children; you are full of virtues and merits, but I can't understand you; you are hardly my children now. I could understand better if you refused.

JOHN. It's all right, mother. It's all settled.

MRS. HAYLING. He said once that he wouldn't take it.

BOBBY. He'll take it all right, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. You are the worst. You are impudent.

BOBBY. I beg your pardon. I'm horribly sorry when I say things *you* don't like, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. You must not separate me from your father. I won't have that. And I must take sides against you. I can't leave him alone. Parents and children grow apart, I know. Whose fault is it? I can't keep up with you and you grow kind and distant. I can't do anything for you now. I'm no use anywhere.

RHODA. Oh, but—mother——

MRS. HAYLING. Perhaps it'll be better when women get votes and the mothers are clever and know what their children mean.

RHODA. I think you imagine things, mother——

MRS. HAYLING. [*Interrupting her.*] I had a message. He sent me with a message.

RHODA. Yes, mother?

MRS. HAYLING. [*Timidly, shamefacedly.*] He says that if he does borrow your money he must insist that you have 6 per cent. [*A pause.*]

JOHN. And what do you get, mother, for what you have lent?

MRS. HAYLING. I don't know. Would it be 5 per cent.—or perhaps 7?

BOBBY. [*Gloomily.*] One's as good as another.

MRS. HAYLING. Good night.

[*Goes out rather hurriedly.*]

ALL. Good night. Good night, mother.

RHODA. It's rather dreadful.

JOHN. Poor old mother.

RHODA. But you pity him the most.

JOHN. It ought to be worse for him.

BOBBY. But is it?

RHODA. John, have you ever thought that we are what we are because it's as mother said?

JOHN. What did she say? And what are we?

RHODA. Well, we *have* grown apart—it's not only father. She has always been kind, but we have gone our way. Don't you see her now craving for a share? Isn't it dreadful to hear her acknowledging that we are kind? How cruel we have been!

BOBBY. There's something in that.

RHODA. But think: if father had always kept with us—you know how we all did love him once—if we had taken our habits and our thoughts from him—what should we have been? We have been cruel to mother and to him too, perhaps. But it's let us be ourselves.

JOHN. It's a dreadful thing to be a parent, then. You must be alienated from your children or they can't grow.

BOBBY. Can't you grow with them?

RHODA. You think so. You mean to. But how many do?

BOBBY. It's their fault. They're not liberal.

JOHN. Even mother——

BOBBY. Well, you know, mother was never an intellectual woman.

RHODA. [*Laughs almost hysterically.*] Oh, Bobby, you're funny. You are funny.

BOBBY. [*Indignantly.*] What do you mean? You misunderstand. Of course motherhood, you know—motherhood's a different thing. It's holy and all that——

JOHN. Bobby doesn't mean anything disrespectful to nature and the holinesses. But you are funny, Bobby. God bless you for it! We want all we can get.

BOBBY. [*With dignity.*] Let us get back to business. Now look here— We'd better consider our little fortunes pooled. I ought to have a chance at some of that 6 per cent. My investments aren't so good as that, I suppose.

JOHN. You're a humorist, Bobby.

RHODA. He's magnanimous for we've been laughing at him.

BOBBY. What I want to insist on is the idea of the family community. Well, I suppose we should have been pals, family or not. We'll pool, anyhow.

JOHN. You're an advanced thinker.

RHODA. He's a dear boy.

JOHN. I know that.

BOBBY. Rot !

[*Enter HAYLING in dressing-gown.*]

HAYLING. Excuse me. Pardon me, Rhoda. I felt that sleep would be impossible until—I have hardly been fair to you. I have taken too much for granted. I wish to humble myself.

RHODA. Oh, father, don't do that.

HAYLING. Yes. My folly and credulity—my rashness—not ignoble faults, I trust—have brought misfortune—temporary misfortune to us—to you. I understand from your mother that you offer to lend me this money—my impulse was to decline it. Your attitude, I confess, did strike me as a little—shall I say?—ungracious. Let us waive that. I have certain standards. Perhaps I am too exacting. But let us turn a united front to misfortune. Let me be assured of the affection and sympathy of my children.

JOHN. [*After a short pause.*] I'm sure, sir, that we have every desire for your comfort and—prosperity.

RHODA. Yes, father.

BOBBY. Certainly.

HAYLING. And is that all?

JOHN. What do you ask from us?

HAYLING. Let me remind you that I am your father.

JOHN. Don't force us to insincerity. We have got out of the way of—of shows of affection. You know young people nowadays are very unsentimental. Well, sir, I shall be glad to lend you what money I have.

HAYLING. Money is not everything. Can't you see?

—I'm not a stupid man. I seem to be surrounded by enemies. You're my children. You give me your money, I don't know why. I look at you and I see—hostility.

JOHN. No, no, sir. } *Together.*
RHODA. No, father. }

HAYLING. Well, I may fancy myself a kind of King Lear. Oh, a sadly damaged Lear I grant you. The modern Lears are all in the wrong, and the conduct of their children is exemplary. Oh, yes. You've talked me over, you've found me out long ago, you think. Was it not some ancient philosopher who said that mankind could be divided into brutes and humbugs? Probably Marcus Aurelius. Well, I'm a humbug, I suppose. What are you? You leave me nothing but an attitude. Perhaps you've missed something. Good night. *[He goes out.]*

BOBBY. He was never like this before.

RHODA. It makes everything wrong.

JOHN. It's dreadful to think of him conscious all the time.

RHODA. To think that he knows——

BOBBY. He's all the worse if he knows.

JOHN. It's a strange faculty—to be able to shut your eyes to the facts, and yet to know them all the time.

RHODA. It's horrible to think of his knowing what we think.

BOBBY. He'll start his pretending again directly.

JOHN. I'm a mild person, but I think I should like to try getting drunk. How about that, Bobby?

RHODA. Oh, John!

BOBBY. It would be no fun for me if you did it too.

JOHN. Bah! We couldn't get drunk on claret! We are not capable of these natural reliefs. And yet it's a night to be drunk and raise hell. It would be sanity and discretion beside what we are doing. Oh! He's a wonderful person. He'll drag us down, and I believe he could be human if he would.

RHODA. When we were children, John, we all loved him. Can't we turn back?

BOBBY. No use.

JOHN. Can't we turn back? Is it always impossible to do anything—to change anything? We're cowardly. We never try. We let people drift away. It's wicked folly. Better spend ourselves in useless labours—generous labours. [*Suddenly.*] Rhoda, I've something on my mind—you and Felix. With all this bother we're losing sight of that.

RHODA. Oh, John, don't bring that up. I can't think of Felix now. He's not one of us. It wouldn't be fair of me to hold him to it. And I see him hating everything and being so gentlemanly.

JOHN. But, Rhoda——

RHODA. No, John.

JOHN. I can't bear, Rhoda—I can't bear to think of you unhappy.

BOBBY. This is hardly a case for the family to decide, Jack.

JOHN. Rhoda will forgive me.

RHODA. I've never anything to forgive you. I'm going to bed.

BOBBY. Yes, let's go to bed. Come on, Jack.

JOHN. I wonder if I could read for half an hour. I want something big to make our affairs look properly small. [*He looks at the titles of books and takes one down.*] The notion is to get away from all this. Ah! Listen [*He reads or recites*]:

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns, measureless to man,
Down to a sunless sea.”

Think of that! Isn't that refreshing?

BOBBY. Beautiful enough but not big enough.

RHODA. Can you really sit down and read now?

JOHN. No, I suppose not. I wish I could.

RHODA. Well, good night, boys.

JOHN. Good night.

BOBBY. Good night, Rhoda. } *Together.*

BOBBY. I'm going too.

JOHN. Yes, I suppose the servants have all gone. I'll just lock up here. [*He tries window fastenings and places a screen in front of the fire.*] Does it strike you, Bobby, that there is something peculiarly ironical in locking up the house to-night? We lock up what doesn't matter. All that was worth anything has gone.

BOBBY. Do you remember how the governor used to pretend to look round for burglars when we were kids?

JOHN. Carrying that stone club. Yes.

BOBBY. I suppose he always has that thing in his bedroom now.

JOHN. It's a frightfully murderous thing. I hope nobody will ever strike with it.

BOBBY. Good heavens! I hope not. Well—good night, Jack.

JOHN. Good night. [*As he completes his round he turns out the electric light.*]

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns——”

[*He goes out shutting the door and the key is heard to turn in the lock.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

The same. A year later.

RHODA *is alone sewing. BLAIR looks in and then enters.*

BLAIR. Pardon me. Mrs. Hayling told me you were here. Let me come. Let me talk to you a little.

RHODA. Is it worth while? Is it good for us, Felix?

BLAIR. I assure you it's got to be.

RHODA. Well, then——

BLAIR. It's extraordinarily difficult to begin. If you softened a little—if you looked kindly at me—but I don't know. Keep an open mind. Don't reject what I'm going to say too soon.

RHODA. What is it?

BLAIR. I want to come back.

RHODA. I thought we had settled all that.

BLAIR. I've made a discovery.

RHODA. What is it?

BLAIR. You know when you sent me away a year ago I was aggrieved and vexed and wasn't very nice about it.

RHODA. Well, that was quite right. You can't expect a man to be charming when a girl jilts him. It's unnatural.

BLAIR. Did you jilt me? [*A pause.*] Or did I jilt you?

RHODA. Is this the discovery?

BLAIR. I *was* vexed. I *was* angry. I thought myself ready for all kinds of magnanimity, but I know now that you had found out. There was a time—I confess it and it's the bitterest thing I've ever had to say—Rhoda, there was a time when in my heart I didn't want to marry you. I wanted to be clear. I wanted to get away from it all. You and John and Bobby seemed to exclude me and I resented it, but I wanted to be excluded. I hated it all. I'm narrow and cowardly. I was. You found me out and made it seem that you—you——

RHODA. Stop a bit, Felix. Are you going to make out that I've been eating my heart out for you all the time?

BLAIR. Oh, I don't exactly mean that.

RHODA. Well, it wouldn't be true. It wouldn't be quite true.

BLAIR. Not quite true? Rhoda, is it a bit—is there——?

RHODA. I saw you didn't like it at all. I knew you would be frightfully correct and honourable and all that. I wasn't going to be engaged to you in that fashion. And then you did dwindle a bit with me, I think. John and Bobby and I stuck together, and things were going badly and you weren't quite one of us. You are not, Felix, you know.

BLAIR. I want to be.

RHODA. But it's worse than ever now.

BLAIR. What's worse?

RHODA. You know. The family's down. We seem to be waiting for some kind of smash. My father—I think he's getting desperate; we don't know how long it will last. Mother is strange, she hugs her Bible and we can't get near her. We've been trying, you know, to make friends with our parents—even Bobby. It's been a failure. We must be horribly in debt. And poor John! His chances seem to be gone. He's doing some *locum tenens* work now when he can get it. Did you hear of his awful mistake?

BLAIR. No.

RHODA. He cut off the wrong finger. A man that came to him. How could he make the mistake? He was so terribly preoccupied and harassed. There was compensation to pay and a kind of hushed scandal—worse for him than an open one. He wanted to tell everybody. Think of John. John!

BLAIR. Oh, I am sorry.

RHODA. I never felt anything so much. He told us about it and he began to laugh. He made us laugh. We were all hysterical. Yes, we laughed, and John's the kindest man—you know. It's dreadful. He seems to be losing faith in himself. And I'm afraid of Bobby losing faith in him. This is no place for you, Felix.

BLAIR. Yes, it is.

RHODA. It's worse than ever. You didn't like it before. Now, we're poorer and shabbier and

wretcheder. I don't know where it's going to end. It's no place for you.

BLAIR. The worse it is the better for me.

RHODA. How can that be?

BLAIR. I want to endure something hard. I want punishment.

RHODA. You come here for that, Felix? I'm punishment?

BLAIR. I come to you. Yes. My joy and my punishment are here together. I'm bitterly ashamed. I want you to try me again. I've been away for a year, thinking of you all the time. It was a relief at first. I'm as base as that. Then it became a frantic hunger for you. I held off, I daren't come back. Now I must. I was so miserable without you that I believe it's changed me. I want you to set me something hard. Take me on probation.

RHODA. I can't be always judging and considering you.

BLAIR. Take me back.

RHODA. Felix, I don't know what I should have done without you all this year.

BLAIR. This year! Why——

RHODA. Oh, it's been horribly close and confined here. I've had John and Bobby, and it's been interesting too. We kindle one another sometimes and it makes me feel rather fine and exalted. But I wanted something outside of that—some hope. We've been going down, you know. It's good to be with a man like John; and Bobby, too, he's a dear. I'm proud to be with them sometimes. But I've felt that

I wasn't quite loyal. I've always been thinking of you.

BLAIR. My dear, my dear.

RHODA. It's a joy—a joy to see you again, Felix. And I always thought you'd come.

BLAIR. My dear [*taking her hands*], I'm afraid to touch you. I feel unworthy. I'm—I'm absurdly bashful. You're too good. It ought to have been harder for me.

RHODA. It would have been, but I feel worn out. Oh, Felix, somebody's coming.

[*He kisses her hastily and passionately, and they fall apart.* BOBBY comes in.]

BOBBY. Hullo! Felix!

BLAIR. You didn't expect to see me.

BOBBY. Well—you're a bit of a stranger.

BLAIR. Not in future, I hope.

BOBBY. Oh! is that so?

RHODA. The fact is, we've made it up, Bobby.

BOBBY. I'm jolly glad, Rhoda.

BLAIR. I've been eating humble pie.

BOBBY. Well, of course, she's too good for you.

BLAIR. I heartily agree.

BOBBY. But the poor girl wants a distraction.

RHODA. Nonsense, Bobby. I'm not going to have him called a distraction.

BOBBY. You've got a bit to live down, you know. Jack and I have cursed you often. Well, we have, Rhoda. And we're pretty touchy now. People are when they get to our stage.

BLAIR. What stage?

BOBBY. A kind of shabby genteel—verging on that. You might do better to leave us alone.

BLAIR. Confound you, I wouldn't mind leaving you alone if I could have Rhoda. Oh, yes [*pleasantly*], I've knuckled under to her, but I won't have your nonsense. I'm glad to see you again, Bobby.

BOBBY. Well, your attitude is creditable. This is a pretty rotten family to marry into.

BLAIR. You see, I don't think so.

RHODA. Why are you home so early, Bobby?

BOBBY. Well, that's the queer thing. I don't like it.

RHODA. What?

BOBBY. I've had a wire from the governor—rather odd—asking me to meet him here at five o'clock.

[*He takes it out of his pocket and shows it to her. She passes it to BLAIR.*]

RHODA. You've no idea what for?

BOBBY. I suppose not, Rhoda. I suppose I haven't an idea.

BLAIR. What are you doing now, Bobby?

BOBBY. I've got a job in the City. It's rather a beastly warehouse in Aldermanbury. I had to ask off to get here.

BLAIR. Where's John?

RHODA. He's somewhere about, I think. He hasn't any work to-day.

BOBBY. Things couldn't be much rottener.

RHODA. There's a hansom stopping, I think.

BOBBY. It's him. It's the governor.

RHODA. Felix, let's go out. I'll get my hat on.

BOBBY. What does he want? What can he want of me but one thing? What a mess he must be in to come to me! What a hopeless job to come to me!

FELIX. But I thought you—I thought——

BOBBY. The time's up. My money's my own.

RHODA. You see how horrible it all is, Felix.

FELIX. That's nothing. But, Bobby, I suppose you're not going to—to be a fool.

BOBBY. Never fear.

RHODA. Come on, Felix. This way.

[*They go out by side-door.* BOBBY *fidgets about the room till HAYLING enters.*

HAYLING. I'm very much obliged to you.

BOBBY. Why did you want me here? I might have called across to see you.

HAYLING. It was convenient for me to get out of the City early to-day.

BOBBY. Well, what is it, sir?

HAYLING. It's an exceedingly disagreeable thing for me to broach this matter.

BOBBY. Then it can't be very agreeable to me.

HAYLING. I must ask for your forbearance.

BOBBY. Very well.

HAYLING. You have now under your control the money that was left to you by your grandmother.

BOBBY. I thought that was it.

HAYLING. Your intuition was not at fault, you see.

BOBBY. What do you want?

HAYLING. I want you to lend me the whole of it.

BOBBY. [*Looks steadily at him.*] You must know that I shall not do that.

HAYLING. I hope you will.

BOBBY. Let me say plainly, once and for all, that it's impossible.

HAYLING. Nevertheless I ask you for it. I want it very badly.

BOBBY. My dear sir, it's nonsense. You waste your time.

HAYLING. I appeal to you, very humbly, as your father—in a desperate strait—for help.

BOBBY. I can't do it.

HAYLING. You wish to force me to explain?

BOBBY. I don't want you to explain.

HAYLING. Must I tell you, then, that my honour is impugned?

BOBBY. What do you mean?

HAYLING. I know I've lost touch with you all. It's the sorrow of my life. It is my fault—mine, my boy. I come to you now wanting help.

BOBBY. Rhoda and John helped you.

HAYLING. That's all past.

BOBBY. You mean it's all gone.

HAYLING. That and more.

BOBBY. And yet you ask me to—to——

HAYLING. To save me.

BOBBY. Whatever sort of a mess are you in?

HAYLING. Will you save me?

BOBBY. [*Frightened.*] What is it? What is it?

HAYLING. I'm a failure. I acknowledge it. I have failed. But not ignobly. By heaven! not ignobly. It seems that I am not a millionaire, but that's a mere accident. I'm the stuff of which millionaires are

made. I hate your peddling commerce. I've flown high and I'm not ashamed of it. I've fallen and others are involved in the crash. I have ruined my children. And yet, if you had imagination I should appeal to it. Your admiration—it would not be too much to appeal to your admiration. My history will never be written. Oh, yes! I'm down, down, and my inferiors are swaying empires—financing them at least.

BOBBY. Now, father, you know I don't like this kind of talk.

HAYLING. I'll come to the point. Your money is now under your control.

BOBBY. Yes, I've just got it.

HAYLING. I have reason to believe that the bulk of it actually stands to your credit in the London and Westminster Bank.

BOBBY. Yes.

HAYLING. Give me a cheque for it.

BOBBY. Look here, sir, I don't want to be uncivil, but you must know that it's useless to talk like this.

HAYLING. If you don't, why, then——

BOBBY. What?

HAYLING. I go to prison.

BOBBY. Why, you don't mean——

HAYLING. I'm a criminal. Yes. Napoleon was a criminal. So was Bismarck. Every man with ambition is potentially a criminal.

BOBBY. Why this is the superman theory!

HAYLING. There is nothing very distressing in being a criminal except that it entails certain inconveniences. I confess I don't like the idea of the

plank bed. I don't blame society. Society must guard itself.

BOBBY. What have you done?

HAYLING. Call it forgery.

BOBBY. It *is* forgery?

HAYLING. A trifling affair. Merely an interference with the machinery of society. Spiritually a man is untouched by forgery. It's not like ill-treating a cat or insulting a woman. These I couldn't do. Each man to his kind. This is a commercial age, and an offence against the rules of commerce is a mighty crime, of course. The want of money was extremely inconvenient to me and I took the simplest way of getting it. This was against the ethics of business, but it is only accidentally that I am in the criminal class. I have no aptitude for crime. It has never interested me. All this is very disagreeable to you, my boy, and I'm sure it is to me. If you can let me have £5000—say £4000—it may save me. It will save you, too, for there's a certain lack of prestige in having a father in jail. An absurd prejudice. As you please. Of course there's your mother—Who's this coming?

BOBBY. It sounds like John.

HAYLING. [*Rapidly.*] All this is in confidence. We'll talk of it again.

[JOHN *enters.*

BOBBY. No, no. I must tell John.

HAYLING. Silence! No.

BOBBY. I will, I must. It's too big for me—this. It's not fair.

JOHN. You're both very early. What is it, Bobby?

HAYLING. Bobby and I are having a private conversation and if you will permit us we should like to continue it.

JOHN. What's this, Bobby?

BOBBY. He wants my money.

JOHN. Ah! I thought so. I guessed it. You're of age. He can get at you now. Oh, it's monstrous—monstrous!

HAYLING. Silence! You don't understand.

JOHN. Don't I understand that you wish to borrow his money?

HAYLING. No——

BOBBY. What?

HAYLING. Not to borrow. He must give—give. I don't suppose you'll ever see it again.

JOHN. That's better. That's franker. That's unabashed villainy. Good heavens, sir, I begin to admire you! You've plucked us. Rhoda and I are penniless now. You gave us a lot of palaver. Now this poor lad is to be overpowered it seems. He's not such a fool. No, it's not clever of you.

HAYLING. Take care what you say. You may regret it.

BOBBY. John, look here——

JOHN. You're my father. I look at you, and you're strangely familiar. You've been with us all these years. Why! we come from you, we're like you. I can feel I'm like you. Little things I do. They terrify me. Are they just superficial tricks, or are you deep down in me? Are you? I loved you when

I was a child—we all loved you. You had your chance. The family! The family! The social unit. Honour thy father and thy mother.

HAYLING. All this is damnably irrelevant. You interrupt a serious conversation.

JOHN. Continue it.

HAYLING. You don't understand, you fool.

JOHN. You've had our money. You might cheat yourself into believing it a legitimate transaction. But to come for his! Is it to go away with—to disappear? It's worth considering. Bobby, it might be worth while.

HAYLING. You have more talent for invective than I thought. You can make a bitter speech.

JOHN. I've had years to get it up. I've rehearsed it in my mind.

HAYLING. You're perfectly right, of course. There's a kind of stupidity about what you say, but that's no matter. You will never understand me. Let us come to the practical point.

JOHN. Ah! the practical point.

BOBBY. John, it's more serious than you think.

HAYLING. I've aimed at great things. You never understood me. I'm a failure. You don't know the depths of my failure. It is men like me that rule the world.

JOHN. Yes. Every human being has his case—even you.

HAYLING. A thousand fail. One succeeds. I'm a beggarly, ruined trader. I've had ideas, ambition, the divine itch. Of course by your standards— You

have some charming notions, I understand, on the subject of the family. I'm your father.

[MRS. HAYLING enters. *She looks from one to the other.*

MRS. HAYLING. [*Querulously.*] What is it? You are quarrelling. I heard your voices. Let us be miserable quietly. Let us have peace.

HAYLING. My dear, it's no use crying peace when there is no peace. I can quote your favourite work, you see.

MRS. HAYLING. What have they done to you? What are they saying? Come away, Godfrey. They are rebellious; they forget their duty.

JOHN. Mother!

MRS. HAYLING. Oh, yes. You'll use fine words about it. You don't think of him. You don't think of me.

JOHN. We always think of you.

MRS. HAYLING. But you want to separate us. You want me to take your side. And I won't. I won't.

HAYLING. Nay, Janet, I'm a broken reed. I'm down. You will do well to leave me.

MRS. HAYLING. Come away with me.

JOHN. No, we must have this out. Who is that? Where's Rhoda? [*Goes to the door.*] Rhoda! Rhoda! [*RHODA with hat on, followed by BLAIR, enters.*] Felix!

BLAIR. Yes, I've come back.

JOHN. No time for that now. I've got something to say, and to you especially, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. I don't want to hear. I don't want to know.

HAYLING. Leave us, Janet. Let me talk to them alone.

JOHN. Yes, you would talk to us separately. Your case is not the same with her.

HAYLING. Well! Go on.

JOHN. Mother, it's useless to screen him. We can't make it easy for you. We would if we could.

[*He lays his hand on her arm, and she throws it off.*]

HAYLING. I don't think we need trouble Mr. Blair. We are having a disagreeable scene, Blair. Take Rhoda away.

RHODA. Oh! What is it, John?

BLAIR. Come, Rhoda.

JOHN. I find him here trying to persuade Bobby to give him all his money.

RHODA. Oh, no, father.

MRS. HAYLING. I can't listen to you. I won't listen.

BOBBY. [*He has been following the conversation anxiously.*] Look here, John. You don't know the circumstances—we'd better not go into this now.

JOHN. The circumstances!

BOBBY. Not before mother—not before mother. [*Aside.*] Come here. Let me tell you.

JOHN. Oh! we must get to the bottom now. We must speak the bitter truth now. It's too late to hush it up. Hush up! We've been hushing up all our lives. [*To Mrs. HAYLING.*] You, poor dear,

you've never done anything else. You're miserable. We're all miserable. And what's the cause? You all know. What's the canker—what has been eating into our lives? It's horrible, it's dreadful; we can't go on. Mother, you must leave him. You must come with us.

[HAYLING, *shaken but inscrutable, sits down and stares gloomily at the fire.*

MRS. HAYLING. Oh! It's wicked—wicked. How can you?

RHODA. Mother, we have all borne too much. It is as John says.

HAYLING. Ha! Sweet girl.

BOBBY. Yes, yes, John. I stand by you. But you don't quite understand. It's an awkward matter. It's dreadful. How can I explain, sir?

JOHN. What! Is he going to diddle you? Has he got round you?

RHODA. Bobby, we must stick together.

BOBBY. I know, I know—but things are worse than you suppose.

JOHN. Mother, we can live with him no longer, and we ask you to come with us. It'll be a poor enough place, wherever it is, but we want you there.

MRS. HAYLING. It's no use. How can I?

JOHN. And you can leave us? You're wrong—you're wrong. There can be no happiness for you with him. And it's we that matter. Your children.

MRS. HAYLING. Happiness! What's that? If I went with you—you'd be kind. Of course you'd be kind. You would never let me in—the three of you—

I should always be the outsider, the old mother. I might as well stay here. And he's my husband. What has he done? Why are you so set against him now?

JOHN. It's the last straw. He's trying to rob Bobby now.

MRS. HAYLING. [*Rather listlessly.*] Is that it, Godfrey?

HAYLING. This is really an academic discussion.

MRS. HAYLING. What do you mean, Godfrey? Don't puzzle me.

HAYLING. [*Rises and bows to her.*] I have to thank you for a little humanity. You are not effusive, though. I am here at some disadvantage. These young people regard me as a scoundrel. A scoundrel is one who has not succeeded and does not tamely acquiesce in his failure. As I have explained to Bobby, I want money very badly. I should not trouble him—I should be prepared to suffer—anything you like—penury, hunger—but, unhappily, my necessities are pressing. My honour—the honour of this family—is involved. I have been overcome by misfortunes. I require money. I've become the desperate beggar. Mr. Blair, I want money, money. I must have money. You look on me with amazement and horror. I hope to God that none of you will ever suffer as I am suffering now. You shall give me money, Felix. Lend me five thousand pounds.

BLAIR. I don't understand you, sir.

HAYLING. I speak simply. A child could understand. I am a child. I have become as a little child.

A child's rapacity. A child's terror. Well, you are accustomed to my poses, I dare say. Perhaps I am posing now. I'm no fool. I believe in maintaining the forms. You do not, and perhaps you're right. You think you found me out long ago, and pretences have grown rather thin.

MRS. HAYLING. Godfrey, what does it all mean?

HAYLING. My dear creature, it's very hard on you, and here I am talking above your head.

BLAIR. I think we are all bewildered, sir.

HAYLING. By the by, Mr. Blair, in what capacity are you here? This is rather an intimate occasion. Are you affianced to my daughter?

BLAIR. Yes.

HAYLING. Rhoda?

RHODA. Yes.

HAYLING. It does you credit, Mr. Blair. Obviously this family is not on the up grade. I think you would do well to clear out while you have the chance.

BLAIR. No, sir.

HAYLING. Rhoda hasn't a penny.

BLAIR. I know.

HAYLING. Yes, but do you know that her fortune is a minus quantity?

BLAIR. I don't quite follow you.

HAYLING. There's a family to support. An impecunious father. Do you feel like keeping me? Somebody will have to do it. Perhaps the State.

MRS. HAYLING. Oh, Godfrey!

HAYLING. Did I say keeping me? It's more than

that. Redeeming me—getting me out of pawn.
Who'll pay my debts?—who'll——

[He stops and exchanges glances with BOBBY.]

BOBBY. Oh! tell them, sir, and be done.

HAYLING. Bobby, come here.

[He takes BOBBY'S arm and they walk apart to the window, the others watching them. They whisper together. BOBBY looks out and starts, instinctively pulling his father away. HAYLING stares out of the window, then goes back to a chair and sits down heavily.]

JOHN. What is it?

[There is a silence. BOBBY, greatly agitated, looks at his father.]

HAYLING. Bobby seems to be interested in two policemen who are standing outside.

JOHN. Policemen!

HAYLING. I remember that I used to be afraid of policemen as a child.

JOHN. What have we to do with policemen? Bobby, what's the matter?

HAYLING. Don't let us speak disrespectfully of policemen. They are society's greatest achievement. Individually they are rather ponderous, and I could never make out why they wear such large, thick boots. Perhaps they represent the stability of society.

BOBBY. It can't be—do you mean to say——

MRS. HAYLING. What has happened? What is it?

HAYLING. *[To BLAIR.]* Give her any help you can. These others have very little sense.

BLAIR. I'm all at sea, sir. [*A MAIDSERVANT enters.*

MAID. [*To MRS. HAYLING.*] A gentleman wants the master.

HAYLING. What kind of a gentleman?

MAID. He followed me up the stairs. I told him to stay down.

[*BOBBY approaches his father and stands by him.*

HAYLING. Where is he?

MAID. I think he's just outside the door.

MRS. HAYLING. What does it mean, Godfrey? What is it?

HAYLING. I shall not want your money, Bobby, after all.

JOHN. [*Excitedly.*] Who is this fellow lurking there? [*He goes towards the door.*

HAYLING. Stop. [*He calls loudly.*] Come in, sir. [*A DETECTIVE enters.*] What is your business?

DETECTIVE. I want Mr. Godfrey Hayling.

HAYLING. You are addressing him.

DETECTIVE. I have a warrant for your arrest.

HAYLING. Really! What's it all about?

DETECTIVE. The charge is forgery. I can read the warrant now, or later if you please.

HAYLING. Well, wouldn't it be pleasanter to put it off as long as possible? I suppose it's not interesting? You know, I'm always daunted by the verbiage of these law documents.

DETECTIVE. As you please. I must warn you that anything you say——

HAYLING. Oh! Yes, yes. I understand.

DETECTIVE. When you are ready, sir, I am.

HAYLING. [*To DETECTIVE.*] Will you do me the favour to retire for a few minutes? I wish to speak to my family.

DETECTIVE. I must remind you, sir, that there is another door to this room.

HAYLING. Quite so. But if you will stand just outside that door you can see that I don't run away.

DETECTIVE. I can't give you many minutes, sir.

HAYLING. Janet, will you put a few things in a bag for me—my week-end bag. I shall not want dress clothes.

[*MRS. HAYLING rises and RHODA goes quickly to support her.*]

BOBBY. Better take her out, Rhoda.

MRS. HAYLING. No.

HAYLING. By the by, do we want Jane?

RHODA. Jane, go and get the master's bag and put some shirts and things in it. At once. [*MAID goes out.*]

HAYLING. [*To DETECTIVE, who has not moved.*] Well, sir?

DETECTIVE. Five minutes.

[*He goes to the door and stands outside, just in view.*]

HAYLING. Thank you.

JOHN. Sit down, mother, sit here. Father, what is it?

HAYLING. Try an intelligent deduction from what you see.

JOHN. You've—it's—what?

MRS. HAYLING. Tell us, tell us, Godfrey. Whisper it to me.

HAYLING. This is all wretched tactics. You're giving me away to that fellow at the door. Damn them, they've been quick. Mr. Blair, I'm sorry if I spoke to you rather coarsely just now. I'm afraid you're going to marry into the criminal classes—though, of course, now—I have a moment's curiosity—you propose to retire? You will cry off now?

BLAIR. No, sir.

HAYLING. Good. Young people like to be magnanimous. Well—explanations are useless and tedious. We must not keep our friend waiting. Where is that bag?

JOHN. But what— Good heavens! What is it?

BOBBY. [*To JOHN, but the others can hear.*] It's forgery.

[*MRS. HAYLING moves feebly in her chair and raises her hand as if to enforce attention, but subsides without speaking. JOHN strides up to his father and takes his arm. Presently RHODA follows him.*

JOHN. Father! [*HAYLING looks at him inquiringly.*] I'm—I'm—oh, father. Father, I bitterly regret all I said to you. Forget that.

RHODA. Yes, dear father.

[*BOBBY skirmishes round sympathetically.*

JOHN. Can anything be done? Any defence? Is that fellow listening?

[*BLAIR goes to shut the door. The DETECTIVE declines to give way.*

HAYLING. This is all very touching. [*He approaches his wife.*] Janet, I'm sorry for you. I had intended

to make you a—a millionaire's lady. We might have done great things. I never had any of these Radical objections to the House of Lords. Well, I'm afraid it will be all extremely uncomfortable for you. My very sincere apologies and regrets.

MRS. HAYLING. Godfrey, it is not of me that you must ask pardon. You will have time to meditate and—to repent. Oh! my husband! This may help you. This may save you. Acknowledge your transgression, seek for mercy, or the vengeance of God may overtake you.

HAYLING. It seems to me that He's done pretty well already. But I don't complain of your attitude, it's intelligible enough. These young people puzzle me a little. They're so curiously soft. As your father I was an object of loathing and disgust. What have I done to deserve your kindness now? Simply become one of the criminal classes. There's your modern humanitarian. I've qualified for your interest and sympathy now. Well, your old dad is going to have a bad time. Mr. Blair, good day. Where is that bag? Oh! give me a drink before I go. It may be the last for some time.

JOHN. [*Goes to the cupboard.*] What will you have?

HAYLING. What's there? Whisky, I suppose. Port? Ah! Some of that '68 we had the other night. That will do. Here, sir. [*To DETECTIVE.*] A glass of wine before we go.

DETECTIVE. No, thank you.

HAYLING. Permit me then. [*JOHN pours out wine.*]

MRS. HAYLING. Godfrey, it's not a time for this.

HAYLING. Don't grudge me a little pleasure. Don't grudge me this. To our next meeting. [*Drinks.*] Ha! We haven't much of this wine left. What about re-corking? John, this must be seen to. It may be all right for a year or two, perhaps. Humph! A year or two. We approach a delicate question. [*Finishes the glass.*] A year or two. One more. My God! One more glass. I don't enjoy it. [*JOHN pours out wine again. The maid appears with bag. RHODA meets her, opens the bag and looks into it, speaks to maid, who goes out again. HAYLING finishes wine.*] No, I don't enjoy it. It was a mistake; I wanted champagne. Now, sir, I'm ready.

[*He hesitates beside his wife and touches her on the shoulder. She sits humped together and does not respond.*]

RHODA. Mother, he's going.

HAYLING. As you please.

MRS. HAYLING. You take it wrongly. I hate this bravado. You should weep, you should repent, you should cry for God's mercy.

HAYLING. All I can do is to ask for your pardon.

MRS. HAYLING. That's nothing.

JOHN. I'll go with you, sir.

HAYLING. No.

[*The three children go towards the door and he waves them back. He walks out, the DETECTIVE standing aside and then following.*]

MRS. HAYLING. There's the bag.

RHODA. I sent Jane for——

JOHN. The bag!

[Takes it and hurries out. The rest stand listening.]

MRS. HAYLING. I'm a hard woman. I've a great deal to bear and it's made me hard. *[She rises.]* I don't like Felix to be here.

BLAIR. It's right for me to be here. I want to be with you.

[A door closes below. They wait and JOHN comes back. As he advances into the room he bursts into sobs.]

RHODA. *[Goes to him.]* Oh! don't, John, don't!

BOBBY. Steady, steady, John.

MRS. HAYLING. What is it? He's gone. You're rid of him. Isn't that enough? What did you want?

JOHN. Why didn't you tell me, Bobby? You knew, it seems.

BOBBY. Mother was here and then——

JOHN. I feel horrible. I feel unclean.

RHODA. You've done nothing but what's good and right.

JOHN. When I spoke like that to him I felt like a man blaspheming. I was forced on for I hated him then and I was excited. And yet, all the time, something was crying, "He's my father. He's my father." It's too hard for me. I could lay my life down for him now. What will they do to him? What is he going to? I mean to-night. What——what——how long——

BOBBY. We all feel a bit like that, I suppose. But

you mustn't—you mustn't. You're going too far. I thought you were a tough customer.

RHODA. John feels more deeply than we do. Yes, you do. You make me feel like it, too. But I'm not like you.

MRS. HAYLING. Why all this show of feeling? You're too late. Why didn't you do it before?

BOBBY. Because we never felt it before.

JOHN. Mother, since we were all happy kids with a jolly father—you remember, Rhoda?—we all remember that—since then I've never felt so close to him as to-day. I said terrible things to him and they were true. I wanted to hurt him. And now this awful thing has come to him and I can't bear it. I'm as weak as putty.

BLAIR. You've nothing to reproach yourself with.

JOHN. If, now, I could have made him see how much I felt——

RHODA. He kept very hard about it, John. He didn't encourage us.

BOBBY. Plenty of pluck. Plenty of pluck.

BLAIR. You've all done your best.

JOHN. We don't matter. We are thinking of him.

RHODA. Oh, John, you are strange. I love you for it.

MRS. HAYLING. [*Suddenly*]. He must pay the price of his sins. His punishment is just. Why do you all soften to him now? It is God's wrath that has overtaken him.

BOBBY. God's wrath! Oh! come—come—mother

MRS. HAYLING. We have all sinned. We have trusted in ourselves and not in God. You children have drifted away; it seemed hopeless to stop you. And I've been slack and cowardly. It has all seemed hopeless. I don't belong to you at all. I pretended to put my trust in God, but I never did. I'm the worst of all. I'm His only servant here and I've betrayed Him—so this punishment comes to me.

RHODA. Mother, what could you do?

MRS. HAYLING. What have I tried to do?

JOHN. What have any of us tried to do? What could any of us do? Look at him. Consider him. Our father—your husband. What could turn him back? What could save him? Perhaps this horrible disgrace might have been averted, but that's nothing. He's no worse to-day than he was yesterday—he's no worse than when he was a new-born child. It was all there, it must come out. It's not your fault. Take comfort in that.

MRS. HAYLING. Comfort! Comfort in that! You say I've lived all these years with a man damned from the beginning and I'm to take comfort in that. And you all go your ways. My prayers over you have been wasted breath. You say it's all settled at the beginning. And what may a mother do when her children grow away from her if she may not pray?

RHODA. We are closer to you now than ever we were before.

MRS. HAYLING. No, I've lost you.

LAIR. Mrs. Hayling, may I say that I never saw

children more attached to their mother than they are to you?

MRS. HAYLING. Then all the mothers have lost their children. Let me take comfort in that. Oh, they're kind, I know. I've nothing to say against them. What time is it? Rhoda, we must prepare tea.

RHODA. I'll do it. Come to your room.

[RHODA and MRS. HAYLING go out.]

JOHN. And what is *she* to do?

BLAIR. Your mother?

JOHN. It's hardly better to think of her than of him. What does she do now? Do you have that foolish habit of following people in your mind, Felix? Better forget them when they've left the scene. Have you ever been to a play and tried to follow the people after their exits? It seems to break the play down sometimes. And what will she do now?

BOBBY. She'll get out her Bible. Chilly work.

JOHN. Step by step, heavily, to her room and then— Where is he now? [Looks at his watch.]

BLAIR. Exchanging politenesses with the jailers.

JOHN. But he'll be alone directly.

BLAIR. I'm getting a bit tired of this line, John.

JOHN. You're quite right. [RHODA returns.]

RHODA. She won't let me stay.

BOBBY. Has she got her Bible out?

RHODA. No, she won't. She's sullen.

JOHN. And what must we do now? What's the next thing to be done?

BOBBY. Let's do something. Let's go to the theatre.

RHODA. Don't be horrible, Bobby.

BOBBY. Surely you don't see any harm in that. Distraction is what we want. And the theatre is not merely a place for frivolous amusement, it's——

RHODA. Don't be absurd, Bobby.

BOBBY. I don't see why we should insist on being miserable.

RHODA. I'm not. I'm not miserable. I'm not, John. You and Felix and Bobby seem ever so much more to me than you were. I wouldn't miss it. It's not all misery. And I'm excited. Of course there's Felix. It's different for me. But we may all be happy enough some day.

JOHN. Happy!

[In wandering about the room he has picked up something and stands looking at it in his hand.]

RHODA. What's that, John?

JOHN. His pipe.

BLAIR. Oh, heavens! No sentiment.

JOHN. Wasn't there something in what he said about forgery? It's not one of the unpardonable crimes. We've all done things as bad as forgery.

BOBBY. It's just a link in a chain. It's not only the forgery.

RHODA. Oh! How can we discuss it! There's nothing so merciful as silence.

JOHN. Yes, silence.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT III

SCENE I: *A shabby room in a poor house. The HAYLINGS less well dressed. Nearly three years have elapsed. There are two doors to the room, which therefore constitutes a kind of passage. MRS. HAYLING enters bearing a tray, hears the door bell, puts the tray down and goes to answer the door. She returns with GRIMSTON.*

GRIMSTON. He has come, then? He's here?

MRS. HAYLING. He's lying down, upstairs. Yes, he's come.

GRIMSTON. And the young people—where are they all?

MRS. HAYLING. They've not come back. They've missed him. He was let out sooner than they said.

GRIMSTON. What! They were there?

MRS. HAYLING. They all went. Felix Blair, too. They went to wait for him outside the prison gate.

GRIMSTON. Bravo! Bravo!

MRS. HAYLING. You're pleased? You like that?

GRIMSTON. Don't you?

MRS. HAYLING. I don't know. I don't know what to think. They used to be cold and resentful with him, and then he goes to prison and it's all loving-

kindness. And I'm the other way. I'm bitter and resentful to him still. I was a faithful wife; I did my best; but now it's all broken off, and how can I begin again? He's been away for three years, and now he's different and strange. I'm uncomfortable when he's near me. Uncomfortable! Why! I hate him. And I can tell this to you. I've lost my sense of shame.

GRIMSTON. They haven't seen him yet, then?

MRS. HAYLING. They're going to be ever so magnanimous, I suppose. It's easy for them. They never really come close to him. But all these years we've had this return hanging over us. I think they've been happy. They have one another. And yet they're not getting on well—Bobby and John. I suppose this is against them. We're frightfully poor. I don't know how we shall exist now.

GRIMSTON. Well, well. I can help you.

MRS. HAYLING. I should hate that.

GRIMSTON. And when is Rhoda to be married?

MRS. HAYLING. I don't know. Soon, perhaps. It was not to be until after her father came out.

GRIMSTON. Did you ever understand why?

MRS. HAYLING. Oh! some nonsense. I don't know. Felix didn't satisfy her at first, but she took him back and then—I don't know. I think she cares most for Bobby and John.

GRIMSTON. She set him an expiation? I think Bobby gave me some hint of it. Mere romance, he called it. You're all very curious and interesting.

MRS. HAYLING. I dare say!

GRIMSTON. Well, but you've had your children. You have them now. And to have such children as these—I envy you. I do. I envy you. You should be a happy woman.

MRS. HAYLING. I? A happy woman? With my children?

GRIMSTON. Haven't they been kind to you?

MRS. HAYLING. Kind! How stupid you are? It's not kindness that I want. Haven't I told you fifty times.

GRIMSTON. You've told me very little.

MRS. HAYLING. I don't understand them. They don't make things plain to me. Often and often they stop talking when I come in. Then one of them says something kind. Am I rather a stupid woman, do you think?

GRIMSTON. No—no. But you can't enter into all the feelings and thoughts of your children.

MRS. HAYLING. Nobody admires them as I do. I can see a great deal. They are charming to me, they are wonderful, but I'm shy with them; I can't intrude on them, just because I'm their mother. Oh! if I could do something for them—again. Once I was their mother. I did everything. I want to come in again. I've lived alone. My husband—well—that didn't last long. But when they grew up I had to side with him. I don't know why. It was they that I loved all the time. And so we fell apart. Kind! No children could be kinder. I might have done better. I'm an intelligent woman, aren't I? You wanted to marry me. Of course, I was pretty then.

I don't think they've been quite fair. I could understand more than they thought.

GRIMSTON. It's not too late.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes, it's too late. And I'm not clever enough, really. It's too late for me. And I hate it when they condescend. They're sometimes rather stupid. I can do nothing to interest them. Drudgery, of course—housework. Rhoda and I do it altogether, you know. There we are, working together—talking—and yet we might as well be silent. She's very good.

GRIMSTON. My dear friend——

MRS. HAYLING. Let me talk. I suppose I'm enjoying this. I want to talk. There's religion. I've tried to be religious. I *am* religious. But I'm not merciful. I read the Bible; but, do you know, I read the Old Testament nearly every time? Isn't that rather dreadful? Those old quarrels and resentments I like—those people who did terrible great things. They knew what to do. I can only suffer. I can only endure. I'm tired of that. That's the New Testament.

GRIMSTON. You must break down this barrier between you and your children—if it exists. They would be ready enough, I'm sure. But, my dear Janet——

MRS. HAYLING. Don't call me that.

GRIMSTON. Well—well——

MRS. HAYLING. I don't want to think of all that. It's too far off. It's too long ago. We're old. It's all over—nearly all. You're not afraid of the past. You're a comfortable person.

GRIMSTON. I must have a talk with these young people.

MRS. HAYLING. Don't tell them—don't speak to them. I would never forgive you.

GRIMSTON. I should not tell them what you have said but what I know.

MRS. HAYLING. You must not. You must not. Not a word.

GRIMSTON. Well—well——

MRS. HAYLING. I couldn't bear that. You'll promise?

GRIMSTON. I'll promise, yes.

MRS. HAYLING. You'd break it? You think promises may be broken?

GRIMSTON. I mean what I say. What's that?

MRS. HAYLING. They're coming back. It's the children.

[RHODA, BLAIR, JOHN, and BOBBY enter, exactly in the order of the first Act, but without buoyancy. BLAIR is well dressed, the others a little bit shabby, but not untidy.]

RHODA. Has he come?

MRS. HAYLING. He's upstairs.

[The four new arrivals stand waiting, looking at her. She does not speak.]

RHODA. Oh! How d'ye do, Dr. Grimston. [GRIMSTON nods at them, etc. RHODA goes up to her mother.] Well, mother?

MRS. HAYLING. Well?

JOHN. [After pause.] We missed him, it seems. We stayed there a long time, but he had gone.

BOBBY. It was very interesting.

MRS. HAYLING. What was interesting?

BLAIR. Bobby's sensations.

RHODA. I think the chief sensation was cold.

BOBBY. A tragic ennui.

RHODA. Oh, yes, Bobby, you're right. It was immense and strange to stand there. We were tasting sensations. We fancied ourselves a little, but there was something real, too. It was awfully depressing. Sinking of the heart. I know now what that means.

MRS. HAYLING. [*To GRIMSTON.*] Listen to them.

GRIMSTON. Do you want them not to talk before you?

RHODA. Forgive us, mother. I'm talking nonsense.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes—yes. But you shouldn't have gone.

GRIMSTON. I wish I had been there with them.

JOHN. How is he?

MRS. HAYLING. Your father? I don't know. I suppose you'll see him presently.

JOHN. He's changed?

MRS. HAYLING. No. Oh, yes! Greyer, I think. [*A short pause.*] People don't change.

JOHN. No, you're right, mother. They don't change, and yet—there's always something new to find. It's been there all the time and we've never found it. We don't get at one another; we let things drag on. Now what's going to happen? Mother, what are we going to do?

MRS. HAYLING. I don't know.

RHODA. Is he coming down?

JOHN. Are we going to fall into the rut? Are we going on as we did? He's human—he's human. We can't live as we did before. Mother, we must be all together—really together—not merely under the same roof.

MRS. HAYLING. Am I to be one of you, too?

RHODA. You, mother?

JOHN. Yes—yes. She's right. We've left her alone, too. You know we have. But now—now—Think of all we have in common. It's everything—everything. Oh! we've talked apart sometimes—Rhoda and Bobby and I. We've had notions that you don't share—about pictures and books—plays—that sort of thing. That's nothing—nothing. You can't mind that.

RHODA. You must help us, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. It's no good.

RHODA. Don't say so, mother. Don't say so.

GRIMSTON. What is your father going to do?

MRS. HAYLING. What could he do? He'll be here all day long.

JOHN. We must find some employment for him.

RHODA. Hush! He's coming.

[HAYLING enters. *He is carefully dressed in rather old-fashioned clothes. He is greyer, older. JOHN advances quickly to him, and the rest, except MRS. HAYLING and GRIMSTON, follow.*

JOHN. Ah! We missed you—we're so sorry.

RHODA. Welcome, father.

BOBBY. How are you, sir?

HAYLING. [*Nods rather coolly, keeping them off.*] Yes—yes. Thank you very much. Ah! Grimston. [*GRIMSTON comes forward and shakes hands.*] Mr. Blair, too? Quite a party. Well, Mr. Blair, how are things in the City?

BLAIR. Oh! they're very much as they were when—when—there's no change, I think.

HAYLING. [*Glares at him.*] Humph!

JOHN. How did we come to miss you, father? We had hoped to accompany you home.

HAYLING. Miss me? Oh, yes. You've been waiting—outside——

RHODA. We were all there—Felix, too.

HAYLING. Yes, you were all there. And, if I may say so, a piece of infernally bad taste.

BOBBY. Oh! Come!

RHODA. Father!

JOHN. No, no, sir. Don't think of it that way. We wanted to give you the heartiest welcome. We wanted to begin on a new footing. We want you to understand, now——

HAYLING. Fortunately, I heard that you were coming, and managed to get out rather earlier than had been arranged.

RHODA. You knew that we should be waiting there?

HAYLING. Pray accept my apologies. It must have been tiresome. It's quite charming of you not to be vexed.

BOBBY. Not vexed?

JOHN. Well, well, sir. You played us a fine trick, but we took no harm.

HAYLING. Well, Mr. Blair, you think my conduct was abominable?

JOHN. [*Intervening.*] No, no—you ought to have been consulted. We wanted what you wanted. We made a mistake.

HAYLING. Yes.—Well, Grimston, you'll stay and have—where are we, by the by? What's the time? What's the next meal? I've no watch. Where is my watch. What became of it?

JOHN. You'll remember that you handed it over to me when——

HAYLING. Oh! well—where is it?

JOHN. It was a valuable watch. We've been a bit pressed you know. We sold it.

HAYLING. You sold my watch?

JOHN. I ventured to do so, sir.

HAYLING. Astonishing!

GRIMSTON. I don't think you realize, Hayling, that they've had a struggle to keep going.

HAYLING. A watch is part of a man's personality. It was, as you say, a valuable watch. How the devil can I get on without a watch? I shan't hear the chiming of the prison clock.

JOHN. Take mine for the present, sir.

HAYLING. [*Takes it and handles it disparagingly.*] I don't think I could wear that chain. Is this what is called a Gold Albert? However— [*He puts it on.*] Oh! you've been hard up. Where's Bobby's money?

JOHN. There isn't much left, sir. There were a few debts.

HAYLING. What! Tradesmen, do you mean?

JOHN. That kind of thing, and others.

HAYLING. Why did you pay them? You needn't have done. You're a fool, Bobby, to let your money go like that.

BOBBY. They couldn't afford to lose their money.

HAYLING. Well—well. What's next? Lunch? Breakfast? Where are we?

MRS. HAYLING. Rhoda, we'll go and get tea ready.

HAYLING. Why not let the servants do it?

RHODA. There is no servant.

HAYLING. The devil!

GRIMSTON. You see, Hayling—

HAYLING. Yes—yes. I don't think I want tea. Is there anything else? [*He looks round and fastens his eyes on a cupboard.*] It's some time since I tasted alcohol. Whisky? What?

JOHN. I tell you what we have. We've two or three bottles left of that old port.

HAYLING. The '68? What?

JOHN. Yes. We'll have a bottle. We'll drink your health. Come! let's have a bit of a spree.

HAYLING. We shall want two bottles.

MRS. HAYLING. Better leave it alone.

RHODA. Oh, mother. Let them have a little spree.

MRS. HAYLING. Prayer and fasting.

HAYLING. [*Looks curiously at his wife.*] Don't you think I've had enough of that kind of thing?

MRS. HAYLING. Are you humbled?

HAYLING. No—by God. I'm not.

JOHN. The port's in the cellar, isn't it?

RHODA. I know where it is. I'll get it.

MRS. HAYLING. Rhoda, come with me and get tea ready.

RHODA. Yes, mother. *[They go out.]*

BOBBY. I'll get the port. *[He goes out.]*

HAYLING. Take care how you carry it. What temperature is this cellar?

JOHN. We're past such refinements, sir.

HAYLING. It ought to have been decanted yesterday. I hope it isn't corked. The last time I had port—what made you think of port?

JOHN. Glasses here, I think. *[Gets them out of cupboard.]* How many are we?

HAYLING. I think if you left Grimston and me to drink a glass together quietly—come Grimston.

GRIMSTON. No—no.

JOHN. Not a bit of it, sir. We're all in at this. And there isn't another sitting-room.

BLAIR. Come, Mr. Hayling, there's something jovial about port in the afternoon.

HAYLING. You are still engaged to my daughter, Mr. Blair.

BLAIR. Yes, sir.

HAYLING. And yet you haven't married. I hope your financial position is not as bad as ours.

BLAIR. Rhoda thought a little waiting would be good for me.

HAYLING. And the term of probation continues? How long?

BLAIR. I'm hoping that it will soon come to an end.

HAYLING. How curious! Any good investments about now, Mr. Blair?

GRIMSTON. Now, Hayling. What do you want with investments?

HAYLING. I suppose you always have a certain floating balance at your bankers, Blair. I should like to have a flutter again. Yes, I still have confidence in myself. Ha! You see my trend. Oh! I shall borrow money from you yet.

BLAIR. [*Genially.*] Yes, but it takes two for that.

HAYLING. Good—good. We shall get on together. It's a pleasure to talk to an intelligent man. Of course these poor young people are cleaned out; a man without money is deucedly uninteresting. You are a little horrified, Mr. Blair. You don't like my simple rapacity. I've ceased to be a humbug. There isn't time for it and, besides, my children are really very clever.

JOHN. Well, sir, you've an uncommonly bold vein of joking.

HAYLING. Joking? Yes. Ah! Here's the port.

GRIMSTON. Does anyone really want this port?

[*Bobby enters with two bottles.*]

JOHN. Certainly. [*Calls*] Rhoda, here's the port. Bring mother. Bring the old lady.

[*JOHN and BOBBY open the bottles together.*]

HAYLING. For heaven's sake don't jog it about like

that. Gently, gently Now, Grimston. What are all these glasses? Women don't want port

JOHN. They'll drink your health.

HAYLING. Let's have no foolery. I won't have your damned insults. Come, give us the port. Give Grimston some. [*He takes his glass, smells it, sips doubtfully, then takes a gulp.*] It's strong; it's gross; it's horrible.

BOBBY. Is it corked?

HAYLING. No. I don't know. [*Mrs. HAYLING and RHODA come in.*] What's the matter with me? [*He drinks again and throws his glass into the fireplace.*] What have they done to me? What does it mean?

JOHN. What's the matter?

BOBBY. By Jove!

GRIMSTON. [*Drinks.*] Your palate has been born again and become as a little child. You've been living a healthy life.

MRS. HAYLING. Perhaps there's a chance for him yet.

HAYLING. A chance? A chance for me? Is the wine right, Grimston?

GRIMSTON. Quite good. It's getting rather old and mild.

HAYLING. Mild?

MRS. HAYLING. Can you take your last chance?

HAYLING. What are you talking about?

MRS. HAYLING. To become as a little child. To be born again.

HAYLING. Have you joined the Salvation Army?

JOHN. Yes, mother. There's a chance for us all.

We all want to be born again. Of course it can't be done in a moment. Father, in these years you've changed—not only physically—you must have changed. And we're changed. We're going to start afresh.

HAYLING. What's this rubbish? How have I changed? I remember I had some respect for your frankness. Have you become the humbug now? How are you going to change me? You might turn me into the street. Come, now—dare you do that?

MRS. HAYLING. That's it. That's the only way.

RHODA. Mother!

HAYLING. What! What! You——

BOBBY. She's right.

JOHN. No, no.

HAYLING. [*To MRS. HAYLING with a relic of sentiment.*] Have you turned against me? [*MRS. HAYLING looks at him without speaking.*] Grimston, I understand this is our only sitting-room, but as we haven't a servant you and I might be allowed to sit in the kitchen. Let us end this indecent scene.

MRS. HAYLING. There's no end to it.

JOHN. Yes, but it can change; we can change. I hate this lying down before fate and habit. Let us try at least. Let us try to get back to something human. Father, we've got to live together. If you see any means of supporting yourself apart and wish to do it, of course you're free. We can't help you there; we can barely pay our way. If we are to live together here in hostile camps it's misery and degradation. We acknowledge our fault. We've fallen

apart from you—and from mother. We want to be friends. Is it impossible? Why? Why? Is it that you are implacable or we? Let us go back to when we were children; let's begin again. A lot has happened in between, I know. Oh, we were stupid young prigs, I dare say. Mr. Grimston, you're an old friend of my father's, help us.

GRIMSTON. What's the practical point?

JOHN. Oh! yes. I'm vapouring, no doubt, but it isn't the practical point that matters; it's the spiritual point, the human point.

HAYLING. You have me rather at a disadvantage. I've no money, and I've just come out of jail. I'm a miserable failure.

JOHN. So am I.

RHODA. You are not, John.

JOHN. I can hardly earn a living. I thought I was going to be a big man and I resented it frightfully that you should spoil my chances. But I'm barely competent. I've found myself out. And yet I tried hard enough.

HAYLING. You ought to have been a parson.

JOHN. I dare say. I'm not much of a doctor.

GRIMSTON. Well, there's not much to be done at present. You'll have to settle down.

JOHN. Settle down! Don't let us settle down. Don't get back into the ruck.

GRIMSTON. You can't be always on the high horse.

JOHN. [*Turning to his father.*] Look here, sir. Pardon me. I must speak of it. Your misfortune—yes, your crime—— But in the sight of God there's

no distinction between misfortune and crime. There can't be. [HAYLING makes an impatient movement as if to break away.] No, no—my dear father, listen to this.

BOBBY. You see, sir, we're rather unconventional. We take these things philosophically.

RHODA. Now, Bobby—

JOHN. Father—

HAYLING. Oh! stop! [*He stands staring at JOHN, then turns away.*] Come, Grimston.

JOHN. Father—

HAYLING. Let's have no more of it. You're too late. [*He takes GRIMSTON's arm and they go out.*]

BOBBY. It's no use. You're bowling at a stone wall.

RHODA. No, he was listening to John.

BOBBY. What do you say, mother?

MRS. HAYLING. Have those things come from the greengrocer, Rhoda?

RHODA. No, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. You'd better go for them.

RHODA. Yes, mother. [*She looks at BLAIR, who follows her out.*]

BOBBY. John's a wonderful chap, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. He's wasting his breath.

BOBBY. I'll tell you what he is. He's a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating against the bars his luminous wings in vain.

JOHN. Yes, that's what I feel often enough. I see my absurdity, Bobby.

BOBBY. No—no. My dear chap. You are splendid, you are noble; but the job's too big.

JOHN. [*Wearily.*] What's your plan, Bobby?

BOBBY. I've no plan. We just muddle along till things snap.

MRS. HAYLING. Till they snap?

BOBBY. Yes. Something drastic must come.

MRS. HAYLING. John, what did you mean by talking about crimes and wickednesses like that? Does God see no difference between them and misfortunes? Don't you?

JOHN. His differences are not ours.

MRS. HAYLING. Those old people in the Bible did terrible things, but it was God's will. I've found it hard to understand God's will. And if I should commit a crime would you forgive me? You've been kinder to your father since he was a thief.

JOHN. What crime could you commit, mother?

MRS. HAYLING. Oh! you think nothing of me. You think I can't even do wrong.

JOHN. What wrong could we fear from you?

BOBBY. Mother is not spent. She's a force still.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes, Bobby, I've fallen out. I've been nothing all these years. Why should mothers lose their children as I've lost you?

JOHN. Mother, help us now.

MRS. HAYLING. What can I do now? Mothers are useless when they are old. We bear the child. We have strange thoughts of it that we can't talk about; we don't know how to talk. It's one with us—we are like one creature. Then—every mother knows—the child is a young man or a young woman, and kind to her, but always a little in a hurry. And

you see they are thinking of what they won't tell you about—they are thinking of what they're going to do next—and you want to turn back and be something to them and not a drag and a worn-out creature. We would do things for you if we could—yes, hard things—savage things. You give us your gloves to mend—little things like that.

BOBBY. It isn't the doing great things that matters, mother; it's being ready to do them.

MRS. HAYLING. How do I know that I am ready? I may be a coward. I don't know myself. I've done nothing and been nothing all these years.

JOHN. Mother, you can help us now.

MRS. HAYLING. How can I help you?

JOHN. With father.

MRS. HAYLING. It would have been better for you all if he had died in prison. Better for us all.

JOHN. Oh! don't say it, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. If I can't do things it's something at last to say things. There will be no peace till he is dead.

BOBBY. Mother—mother——

[Enter HAYLING, followed by GRIMSTON.]

HAYLING. I'm no judge of kitchens, but that's a damnable one. I'm going out. Can any of you spare a ten-pound note? I must get a few things.

GRIMSTON. Really, Hayling, you must know that ten-pound notes are not so plentiful.

HAYLING. I haven't attempted to borrow from you yet.

GRIMSTON. Well, I might exact conditions.

HAYLING. Of what kind?

GRIMSTON. We'll talk about it.

HAYLING. In the meantime what am I to do?

GRIMSTON. What do you want?

HAYLING. I suppose I shall want a toothbrush.
You wouldn't deny me a little comfort like that.

JOHN. Let me lend you half a sovereign, sir. It's the only gold I've got.

HAYLING. Thank you. *[He takes it.]*

BOBBY. What about tea? I thought there was some talk of tea.

MRS. HAYLING. Rhoda got it ready. I'll go for it.

JOHN. We'll help you, mother. We'll get it.

[JOHN and BOBBY go out.]

HAYLING. Well Grimston, this is a poor business.

GRIMSTON. Let me say a few plain words to you, Hayling.

HAYLING. Certainly. Let's know your conditions.

GRIMSTON. You assume I'm going to lend you money.

HAYLING. I hope so.

GRIMSTON. It depends partly upon your behaviour.

HAYLING. Well, I admit that my position is not a very strong one. What do you want?

GRIMSTON. I want you to be rather less of a brute and a fool.

HAYLING. You say this before my wife?

GRIMSTON. Yes.

HAYLING. Not quite in the best taste, I think.

GRIMSTON. If you take a little walk now every one

will be glad to be rid of you. Just think things over.

HAYLING. Yes, I'm going. I've got ten shillings to spend. Ten shillings.

MRS. HAYLING. Don't come back.

HAYLING. What!

MRS. HAYLING. You must not come back.

HAYLING. Where must I go?

MRS. HAYLING. You're better anywhere than here.

HAYLING. What am I to do?

MRS. HAYLING. You are not to prey upon your children.

HAYLING. Prey upon them! It should be their privilege to support me. John seems to be infernally incompetent, but he is a human being. He gave me this half-sovereign.

MRS. HAYLING. Why should he give you a penny? Why should any of them lift a finger for you?

HAYLING. I'm their father. They can't get rid of that. And they don't want to. John, at least, has enough imagination to pay me some respect.

MRS. HAYLING. Can you so deceive yourself?

HAYLING. What do you want? What am I to do? Do you think I don't feel my position? I've failed—there's no place in the world left for me, but I'm here. I'm like a pauper moved on to his own parish.

MRS. HAYLING. No, there's no place in the world for you.

HAYLING. What has come over you? Why do you speak to me like that?

MRS. HAYLING. You have transgressed against your children long enough. Yes, and against God.

HAYLING. Grimston, what does she mean?

GRIMSTON. What claim have you here? Why should they support you? Why should they tolerate you?

HAYLING. [*Looks from one to the other and then goes towards the door, calling.*] John! John!

[JOHN enters quickly, followed more slowly and with curiosity by BOBBY.]

JOHN. What is it?

HAYLING. John, I'm losing my nerve. I'm not what I was. She— [*He points at MRS. HAYLING*] she frightens me. I don't understand her now. Is she going mad or am I? She wants to turn me out of the house.

JOHN. Mother?

MRS. HAYLING. Yes. Nothing else will do.

JOHN. But, mother, how can we? What is he to do?

BOBBY. What is she to do; what are we to do if he remains?

JOHN. Silence, Bobby.

HAYLING. John, I've been rather arrogant and unreasonable, I dare say. It's been an enormous strain on me—this homecoming—and all that went before. I've lost my place? I'm to be thrust into the outer darkness? I'm your father, [*to BOBBY*] and yours too. I insist on that. I'm that woman's husband. I belong here. You can't get rid of me. And my sufferings—think of my sufferings. You've had a

hard time here, have you? You've pinched and toiled; you've had the disgrace of a father in jail; it's been a poor time, has it? But what have I endured? All these years—every day—every day—a man like me—I've endured—endured. I've come through it. All the misery of the world was on my back. The chaplain there—I tolerated him, for it was something to speak to an educated man—he spoke to me of the agony of Christ. I've suffered. To suffer—to endure—that's all there was in the world. Could Christ do more? I've done my share. And look at this woman here. Look at my wife. She sits like a stone. You're not like that, John.

JOHN. No, I'm not like that.

[BOBBY sits down limply at the table and buries his head on his arms.

BOBBY. [*Sobbing.*] Mother's right.

HAYLING. Sit up, you snivelling dog. Grimston, lend me a sovereign or a fiver or something. I'm going out.

[GRIMSTON gives him money. He nods and goes out.

JOHN. Mother——

GRIMSTON. Not now. There's been enough of this. I talk as a doctor now. I want your mother to go off to bed.

MRS. HAYLING. Do you think I can sleep?

GRIMSTON. You must sleep. You must go to bed, anyhow.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes, I'll sleep all right.

GRIMSTON. Now what do you mean by that?

MRS. HAYLING. I've got some stuff.

GRIMSTON. What is it?

MRS. HAYLING. It's laudanum.

GRIMSTON. Yes—yes, but that's dangerous stuff. You mustn't be dosing yourself with that.

MRS. HAYLING. I've done it before. It won't hurt me. We all want sleep.

GRIMSTON. How much did you take?

MRS. HAYLING. Not much.

GRIMSTON. Will you promise me to take no more than your usual dose to-night?

MRS. HAYLING. I'll promise nothing, but I shan't take more.

GRIMSTON. Ah! Janet, that's almost like yourself. Now, look here. I'm coming in to-morrow to see you, I can't stay now. We'll talk about this laudanum—yes, and anything else you like. You lads, look after her. Look after your mother. I don't know what to say. You're a queer lot. Janet, they're astonishing young people. I envy you, I tell you. Good-bye, good-bye. I'll find my way out. [*He goes.*]

JOHN. [*Who has stood attentively listening to GRIMSTON.*] Mother——

BOBBY. It's hopeless, John. It's hopeless. Don't torment her.

JOHN. It's not hopeless. You heard him now.

BOBBY. Oh! that talk of Christ. It was a sham. It was clever of him. Perhaps he thought he meant it. It's hopeless.

JOHN. We must try. We must keep on trying.
Mother——

BOBBY. It's hopeless, John. It's hopeless.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

SCENE II: *The same place—midnight of the same day.*

RHODA, JOHN, BOBBY, and BLAIR are round the
fire roasting chestnuts. *A half-light.*

BOBBY. "A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap."

RHODA. "And mounch'd and mounch'd——"

BLAIR. I can't stand those old witches. They're
like nothing at all.

BOBBY. They're an institution. You oughtn't to
attack institutions, Felix. A good conservative like
you.

RHODA. Here's one, John.

JOHN. Oh! thanks. These chestnuts were a jolly
good idea. They make life seem real again.

BOBBY. 'Fore God I could be bounded in a chestnut
and count myself a king of infinite space but that I
have bad dreams.

RHODA. How nice to hear Bobby talking nonsense
again.

BOBBY. Nonsense! Why! It's the Bard.

[*A chestnut bursts with a loud report.*]

BLAIR. That's you again, Rhoda. You must prick
them or slit them.

RHODA. Did I forget again? I can't remember forgetting.

JOHN. You're going to have trouble, Felix, when you set up house.

BOBBY. Chestnuts bursting all over the place.

RHODA. Where's the bag? Lend me your knife, then, Bobby. [*She slits chestnuts and places them on the bars.*] I hope that noise won't bring mother down.

JOHN. She's taken some laudanum, I think. Grimston doesn't like it. He's coming in to-morrow.

RHODA. She wanted father to take some.

BOBBY. That's queer. I thought she wouldn't speak to him.

RHODA. She seemed to want to make it up. It was very strange. He was rather frightened.

BLAIR. Why?

JOHN. We're roasting chestnuts now. We've dismissed all that from our minds.

BLAIR. Hark!

BOBBY. What's that? } *Together.*

[*They look toward the door, and it opens a little.*

MRS. HAYLING, *dishevelled, and in dressing-gown, etc., peers at them.*

RHODA. Oh, mother! What is it?

MRS. HAYLING. There was a noise, a pistol shot. But he's sleeping. I thought it was done—done already. He can sleep.

RHODA. We're so sorry, mother. It was only a chestnut bursting. It did make a terrible noise.

JOHN. You thought *what* was done?

MRS. HAYLING. A chestnut bursting? How absurd! How very absurd!

RHODA. Go to bed, mother, or come and join us. Come and roast chestnuts.

BOBBY. Come on, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. You are strange children.

JOHN. Come and be strange with us.

RHODA. Can't you sleep, mother?

MRS. HAYLING. Sleep! I don't want to sleep.

RHODA. Come upstairs again.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes, I'm going.

[She shakes herself free from RHODA, who would have gone with her, and goes out.]

BOBBY. Now comes my fit again.

RHODA. Yes, that spoils the fun.

BLAIR. What is it? What's the matter with her?

BOBBY. Well, there are plenty of things the matter.

JOHN. Yes, but there's something wrong, deeply wrong. She keeps saying strange things.

RHODA. And what do you think, John? What do they point to?

JOHN. Let's go to bed. Oh! Felix, I beg your pardon. You haven't gone.

BLAIR. No, confound you, but I'm going. Good-bye.

JOHN. No, don't go. Don't let us go to bed. Good heavens! What is there to get up for in the morning? Let's prolong the night. Let's stick to the fire and the chestnuts. I used to like chestnuts. Let's pretend to be jolly.

RHODA. Weren't we really jolly just now?

BOBBY. The jollity was a bit tarnished, I believe. But don't go, Felix.

BLAIR. I'll stop if you like.

RHODA. I don't think it's any good, Felix.

JOHN. No. Good-bye. Good night.

BLAIR. Good night. [*BLAIR and RHODA go out.*]

BOBBY. One thing, John. We must have Rhoda married and out of this.

JOHN. I agree.

BOBBY. She seems no good to mother now.

JOHN. Nobody is. [*The front door bell rings.*]

BOBBY. Hullo! What's that?

JOHN. It can't be anything good.

BOBBY. Cheer up! You never know. It's somebody coming in.

[*GRIMSTON enters with RHODA and BLAIR.*]

RHODA. Of course we're glad to see you but why have you come?

GRIMSTON. I'm a fidgety old man. That's why. Well, John, I'm here again. I was afraid you'd have gone to bed.

JOHN. We've been roasting chestnuts.

GRIMSTON. I've been feeling horribly uneasy all the evening—about your mother. She's not well, you know. I thought I'd just come along and see if she's all right. That's all.

JOHN. She's queer. We don't understand her. But we're all queer.

RHODA. What are you afraid of?

GRIMSTON. Well, it's rather absurd for a medical man to say that his fears are undefined.

BOBBY. All fears are undefined.

BLAIR. Good old Bobby.

RHODA. Ought you to see her?

GRIMSTON. Is she asleep? Where's your father?

JOHN. They're in different rooms.

GRIMSTON. Ah! They've been gone long?

RHODA. She was here a few minutes ago.

BOBBY. Somebody's coming.

[The door opens suddenly and HAYLING appears. He wears an old dressing-gown. He glares at the people in the room, and is listening for sounds behind him.]

RHODA. What is it, father?

JOHN. What is it?

} *Together.*

HAYLING. I can't stay up there.

JOHN. Why not?

HAYLING. My nerves are not what they were.

JOHN. What's the matter?

HAYLING. Is she mad?

JOHN. Tell us what it is?

HAYLING. She was at me before I went to sleep. She wanted me to take some stuff. She called it a sleeping draught.

JOHN. Well?

HAYLING. A sleeping draught.

JOHN. What of that?

HAYLING. If I had taken it I should have been a dead man.

JOHN. Why do you say that?

HAYLING. I woke up just now and she was watching me.

RHODA. Father, it's impossible, it's impossible. You shall not say such things.

BOBBY. She's here.

[MRS. HAYLING enters.]

GRIMSTON. [*Goes forward to her.*] Now, what is it? You ought to be in bed.

MRS. HAYLING. Why is he here?

HAYLING. Who knows if you don't?

MRS. HAYLING. Are you afraid?

HAYLING. She wants to murder me.

RHODA. No, no.

BOBBY. By heavens!—

GRIMSTON. Oh! nonsense, Hayling. What are you talking about?

HAYLING. Why—why must I be persecuted like this? What does it mean?

RHODA. Mother, come away with me.

MRS. HAYLING. No.

HAYLING. I tell you she means to murder me.

JOHN. Mother, would you—would you? What is it?

RHODA. John!

GRIMSTON. Come, come, John.

JOHN. It's true. Let's face the truth.

HAYLING. She wanted me to drink that stuff—why? I can sleep well enough. She tried to force it on me. It was ridiculous—preposterous. I couldn't make it out. Then I saw her watching me.

MRS. HAYLING. We shall never have peace again till he is dead.

RHODA. Oh! mother! }
 BOBBY. By Jove! } *Together.*

JOHN. [*Takes her by the arm.*] It's horrible, it's horrible, old lady. You must be off your head.

MRS. HAYLING. No, I've been passive long enough. I've been a cipher long enough. I've found something to do.

BOBBY. [*Aside to BLAIR, but his voice breaks.*] It's—it's strange, isn't it?

JOHN. What have you found to do?

MRS. HAYLING. To take him out of your lives.

JOHN. You would kill him?

MRS. HAYLING. Yes.

HAYLING. Do you hear that, Grimston? She must be placed under restraint. I'm not safe. Don't go, Grimston. Something must be done.

MRS. HAYLING. It's not for myself. I don't think I care about myself. I've hardly lived for many years. I've been laid away on a shelf. And I've thought about the wickedness of things. It's not murder if God makes you his instrument. It's not murder to save them from their father.

JOHN. What's to be done?

RHODA. Mother, you would make us all miserable for ever.

BOBBY. It's a deadlock. And we've got to go on somehow.

MRS. HAYLING. I've found something I can do at last, and I'll do it.

HAYLING. You hear! You know what she means.

GRIMSTON. A little common sense is wanted here.

JOHN. No. We're beyond that. We want something bigger than that. By heaven! I believe it's the chance of our lives.

BOBBY. [*Bitterly.*] Listen to him.

RHODA. Well, do listen, Bobby.

JOHN. Let's simplify our problem a bit. Rhoda is out. She marries Felix, and lives happy ever after.

RHODA. I can't. How can I leave you like this?

JOHN. Rhoda, let us have this one bit of happiness. Do it for Bobby and me. It's unbearable if you don't. You must.

BOBBY. Yes, Rhoda, you must.

JOHN. Then mother and father and Bobby and I go on together. We do our best; we make allowances for one another; we patch things up. Mother, listen to me. You can help us now. Here's your chance. You are not mad, but you were going to do a mad thing. It's not madness; there's an idea in it. Let's not talk of it or, yes—face it out. You'd kill him. You'd kill our father. It sounds monstrous. I understand. Mother, I understand. Thank God, you are saved from it. It would have been a thousand times worse for us. He *is* our father. Nothing can alter that. We *can't* cast him out; we can't be free of him. Father, we don't want to, but you must do your part. It's—it's—well—to become as a little child. Oh! I know, Bobby. I'm not a man of the world. This is drivelling, you think. It's not. What do you propose?

BOBBY. How can they possibly live together?

JOHN. They've done it all these years.

BOBBY. Well—but——

JOHN. It's their chance. It's their chance.

BOBBY. You would be a great man, John, if you were not a fool. You ought to be a preacher. You'd have a great success if you had no facts before you.

JOHN. Oh! I know. I know.

GRIMSTON. It's no use you young people talking. Ask your father and mother if they are ready to settle down together.

JOHN. Mother——

BLAIR. Mrs. Hayling, are you sure that you are thinking of them—that you want to do this for your children?

MRS. HAYLING. What do you mean?

BLAIR. Aren't you running amok on your own account? Aren't these your own passions and resentments?

RHODA. Felix!

BLAIR. Forgive me!

BOBBY. There's something in that.

MRS. HAYLING. Yes. It gives me fresh life.

HAYLING. How beautiful is a mother's love!

JOHN. It is beautiful—but it's perverted, it's corrupted.

GRIMSTON. I don't see how we can go on discussing whether your mother is to murder your father.

HAYLING. Don't leave us, Grimston.

GRIMSTON. Hayling, pack up your bag. You'd better come with me to-night.

HAYLING. Excellent, my dear fellow, excellent. It's good of you, it's very good of you.

JOHN. That's no solution.

HAYLING. I'll get ready at once.

[He goes up to GRIMSTON and whispers and then shambles out.]

JOHN. What did he say?

GRIMSTON. We are to keep your mother here till he returns.

MRS. HAYLING. *[Laughs.]* Perhaps I've done all that's necessary.

BOBBY. And Mr. Grimston has got a companion for life.

GRIMSTON. Hardly.

JOHN. Nothing is solved. Nothing is done.

BLAIR. Nothing can be solved.

BOBBY. You're right, Felix. But things peter out.

MRS. HAYLING. My children look upon me as a murderess now.

RHODA. No, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. No, it's not to be, and I shall settle down into some kind of death in life again. The chance has gone. I might go up and help him to pack his bag now. But I was murderous. I would have done it and it made me feel alive. I was almost happy; it was beyond happiness. I had been timid and hesitating all my life in doing nothing. Well, it's over. You'll want me to go away next. Who is to take me?

JOHN. We'll stick together, mother.

MRS. HAYLING. Nay, nay.

[She drifts away from him. JOHN goes up to GRIMSTON and engages him in conversation,

RHODA and BLAIR talk apart, BOBBY sits listlessly. Presently MRS. HAYLING goes out unobserved.

JOHN. What are you going to do with him?

GRIMSTON. My dear boy, I haven't a notion.

JOHN. No scheme? No plan?

GRIMSTON. Something *has* to be done. I don't see a day in front.

JOHN. It's good of you, of course, but you're only evading things. I want to get at our difficulties. I want to face them.

GRIMSTON. There are times when it's best to do nothing, to evade things, to wait——

[*There is a muffled sound and a cry.*]

GRIMSTON. What's that. Where's your mother?

BOBBY. [*Starting up.*] She's killed him.

[*They are rushing for the door when HAYLING enters.*]

JOHN. Thank God! Oh! thank God!

[*He would take hold of his father, but HAYLING shakes him off to strike at him.*]

GRIMSTON. What is it, Hayling?

HAYLING. I told you to keep her here.

GRIMSTON. Are you hurt? What is it?

HAYLING. [*Trembling.*] There she was when I looked up. I couldn't stand it. My nerves are not what they were. Oh! Go to her, Grimston. Go to her. [GRIMSTON, RHODA, BOBBY, and BLAIR rush out.]

HAYLING. [*He sits listening. Presently he starts to find JOHN beside him. He gets up and shambles away from him.*] Why did you let her come? You knew

I couldn't stand it. I went mad. I was mad. It was temporary insanity. I was not a responsible agent. And the infernal thing was ready to my hand.

JOHN. What thing?

HAYLING. She can't be much hurt. She fell like—I know it's brutal, but consider my position—my nerves—I was terrified—terrified. I didn't know I was doing it—what is it? Reflex action. Oh! it was horrible—horrible. I'm a sensitive man. I can't stand such things. Why do they happen to me?

JOHN. My poor father, calm yourself.

HAYLING. Why did they leave that horrible stone club in my room?

JOHN. Ah! the club.

[GRIMSTON enters.]

HAYLING. [*Eagerly.*] Well, Grimston—well? You see how it was. She would—she would—nothing very serious? What!

GRIMSTON. She's dead.

HAYLING. No, no! No, no, no!

GRIMSTON. You killed her.

HAYLING. No. It was an accident. It can be explained. You'll see to that; you'll help me, Grimston. I'm an unfortunate man. Oh! Poor girl—poor girl. She's at peace. Think of that. She's at peace. I did it. Yes. But it can be explained quite well. You'll help me.

GRIMSTON. Why should I help you?

HAYLING. You don't bear me a grudge, Grimston. In the old days, I know, you—well— But you were always perfectly decent about that. Ah! why didn't

you marry her? It would have been better for every one. You're the better man. I acknowledge that, I admit it, Grimston. She can't be dead. I hardly touched her. Go back and look at her. It's impossible.

GRIMSTON. Silence, man.

HAYLING. Yes, yes, John, I've suffered a great deal.

JOHN. I know it, father. I'm sorry for you. My poor father, my dear father, I'm sorry, indeed.

[*He takes his arm ; RHODA, BOBBY, and BLAIR come in. They are all now at an extreme tension. They are restless, their voices take strange inflections and sometimes break.*]

BOBBY. Leave him, John. Damn it, come away.

RHODA. John, come, we want you.

JOHN. I can't leave my father just now.

RHODA. Come and help to lift her.

JOHN. I can't leave him.

BLAIR. He's safe enough. There's no mob to tear him in pieces.

JOHN. You must not talk like that.

BOBBY. He's a bloody murderer. [*JOHN strikes him back-handed on the mouth.*] A murderer, a murderer.

RHODA. John, mother's dead.

JOHN. My father's living. He wants me. He wants all of us. This is a living man—a miserable man. It's his time of need.

RHODA. He killed her. He struck her down.

JOHN. He needs our help now. Don't you feel that ?

RHODA. Have you forgotten our mother ?

JOHN. I shall think of her by and by.

BLAIR. What are you going to do ? It's long past midnight.

JOHN. To do ?

HAYLING. Certain explanations must be made.

BOBBY. Explanations !

HAYLING. Grimston can give a certificate of death.

BOBBY. Listen to that.

JOHN. What should we do ?

RHODA. Mother is lying there on the floor. Come, Bobby.

BLAIR. Stay a moment. What are you going to do ?

GRIMSTON. Blair, you seem more sane than the rest of us. What are we to do ?

BLAIR. I suppose the police must be informed.

HAYLING. No, Felix, no. It can be explained. In Rhoda's interest—yours—all of us——

BLAIR. Dr. Grimston, a certificate of death has been mentioned. Is there any chance this way ?

GRIMSTON. With what object ?

HAYLING. Why, Grimston, don't you see——

BLAIR. We wish to avoid the horrible scandal, of course.

RHODA. What does scandal matter ? What a trifle !

BOBBY. No—the scandal is nothing.

JOHN. It's nothing. It's not the point.

BLAIR. What is the point?

JOHN. To help him! To do what we can for him.

BOBBY. Oh!

BLAIR. There are certain difficulties, but if Dr. Grimston will help——

RHODA. Oh! Felix—what can it matter?

GRIMSTON. You mean lying before a coroner's jury?

BLAIR. Is the Coroner necessary?

HAYLING. No. Surely not. We must all tell the same story.

JOHN. You sicken me, father.

BOBBY. Leave him, then.

BLAIR. What do you say, Dr. Grimston?

GRIMSTON. I'm afraid it's impossible.

JOHN. It's better not.

HAYLING. Why, John, John——

RHODA. What would she wish? What would mother wish?

BOBBY. She wished him dead.

BLAIR. Better hush it up. We must make an accident of it. Mr. Hayling, just tell us——

HAYLING. I can't. I can't.

JOHN. Father. Let's go and tell the truth. That's best.

BLAIR. Don't you see, Rhoda, that he would say your mother tried to murder him?

RHODA. And it's true.

JOHN. Perhaps they won't be very hard on you, father, when the truth is known. Come with me.

HAYLING. I can't bear to go to prison again. I can't bear it. Rhoda, would you betray me?

RHODA. I care nothing about you.

HAYLING. Bobby?

BOBBY. Go to hell.

JOHN. You're pitiless. You're worse than he.

RHODA. Let us go back to mother.

BOBBY. [*Pointing at JOHN.*] He hasn't seen her.
John, come and see her.

JOHN. I mustn't see her yet.

BLAIR. Mr. Hayling, they're ready to screen you.
Let's make up a tale.

HAYLING. John, you'll stand by me.

JOHN. If we are to lie and scheme to get you off,
I'll do my part with the rest, I suppose. But I'll
never want to see you again.

BOBBY. Come with us. Don't leave us now, John.

HAYLING. John, you must stick to me. You're the
only one—I'm hardly used. I'm wronged, I'm deeply
wronged.

JOHN. If I could go to jail with you, I would.

HAYLING. What must I do if you desert me?

JOHN. I was never so close to you. I never pitied
you—I never loved you so much.

HAYLING. But I killed her—horribly, brutally. I
can never be the same again.

JOHN. Come with me.

HAYLING. I was not responsible, John. I am not
that kind—murderers——

JOHN. You were a terrified child.

HAYLING. Why are you different from the others?

BOBBY. He hasn't seen her.

HAYLING. [*Clutches JOHN.*] Don't go. Stay with

me. I'll do what you please. I'll do what you tell me.

JOHN. We'll go together now.

HAYLING. But you can't stay with me. You can't be with me—to-night.

JOHN. I'll be with you when I can; I'll think of you. I'll wait for you.

HAYLING. How can you? How can you think kindly of me after what I've done? What's the good of it? I don't understand what you mean.

JOHN. My dear father, we are friends now, we are friends at last.

HAYLING. I'll go with you, John. You're everything I've got in the world now. But there's something foolish about you. [*He points to RHODA and BOBBY.*] They're right.

JOHN. [*To RHODA and BOBBY.*] Can you say a word to him before we go?

[*They all stand silent. JOHN takes his father's arm, and they walk out together slowly.*

BLAIR touches RHODA's arm.

RHODA. Don't trouble me, Felix. Come, Bobby.

BOBBY. [*He watches his father and JOHN go out.*] I don't know what to do.

RHODA. Come. [*They go out together.*

BLAIR. Why did she repulse me?

GRIMSTON. We are outside, we are not of the family.

BLAIR. Dr. Grimston, why is hell let loose like this? Why do all these miseries come to them?

GRIMSTON. [*Partly to himself.*] And yet—she's at

rest—she's at rest. And he's broken. So it should be.

BLAIR. But Rhoda—and Bobby and John?

GRIMSTON. Ah! they're young and strong and full of passion yet.

[GRIMSTON *takes BLAIR's arm, and as they follow*

RHODA *and* BOBBY

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

THE STRICKLANDS
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

MRS. STRICKLAND, *a widow*

HELEN STRICKLAND, *her daughter*

ROBERT STRICKLAND } *her sons*

GERALD STRICKLAND }

GEORGIANA SOUTH

The three Acts are all in one Scene—the living-room in a small house in the country. About a fortnight elapses between the first Act and the second, and about two years between the second and third

ACT I

The living-room in a small house in the country. It is well and simply furnished. There is a door into the garden at the back and another—to the rest of the house—to the spectator's left. There are pictures, books, and signs of women's occupations. MRS. STRICKLAND sits at a table sewing. She drops her sewing on her lap and takes up a Bradshaw. As she turns over the leaves HELEN enters from the garden without hat and carrying a book, in which she keeps her place with her fingers. It is afternoon in early summer. MRS. STRICKLAND is elderly and handsome; some temporary nervousness obscures an expression usually sedate. HELEN is a beautiful, homely young woman, plainly and freshly dressed. She is a little nervous, too.

HELEN. Now, mother, put that Bradshaw away. You might be learning it by heart.

MRS. STRICKLAND. No; but it just occurred to me that Robert might possibly have lunched at Southampton before he started.

HELEN. I say he'll be here in half an hour; but he ought to let us know.

MRS. STRICKLAND. He might have made his telegram more explicit.

HELEN. That wouldn't be like Robert unless——

MRS. STRICKLAND. Unless what?

HELEN. Oh! It's abominable of me. I was going to say—unless he had something to gain by it.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You mustn't say such things—nor think them.

HELEN. I know we must give him a chance.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Give him a chance, my dear?

HELEN. Yes, mother. Don't let's pretend that he's behaved decently to you or to any of us.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You won't let him see anything when he comes.

HELEN. Yes, that's it. We must be motherly to our long-lost son, and then he assumes that it's all right and that a casual explanation will do. It won't. Oh! don't be afraid, mother. I'll be quite nice when he comes and kiss him and all that. He's got to talk to me afterwards though.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Men don't like writing letters.

HELEN. Yes, they're selfish beasts.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Now, now, Helen——

HELEN. Oh! I'm sorry, mother. That's just an ugly little bit of suffragism. Stupid, too. I'm frightfully excited about Robert's coming, really. He'll get round us; he'll charm us; and I'm resenting it beforehand.

MRS. STRICKLAND. He may have changed. He may be very different. Six years is a long time and he's had some hard experiences. It must be a dreadful place. He'll be glad to get home. Helen, I think sometimes that he's coming because he's

changed. He wants us. I feel as though he were going to be a little boy again. And yet I'm afraid.

HELEN. Oh, yes, let's hope. But you mustn't be disappointed. Why! he can't be improved. What he was is the best he can be. All those years on a rubber plantation driving slaves! They *are* slaves. I don't think he dare write home; I don't think he could. And now he's a rich man, he says. Mother, there's a strange rich relation coming to visit us and we're all in a—in a perturbation about it. I say what comes into my head. I'm selfish too. But mother, mother—I've always talked like that to you. That's the only way. If I don't do that we become strangers.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I'm not afraid of anything you say. It's better said. And soon you'll have to go.

HELEN. To New Zealand? Tom must wait. Or you'll have to go too.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Well, one thing drives out another. Where's Gerald?

HELEN. He's in the garden. He was at the gate looking down the road.

MRS. STRICKLAND. For Robert?

HELEN. Or for Georgie.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes, yes. [GERALD enters.

HELEN. A watched pot never boils.

GERALD. Just what I said to myself.

HELEN. But which pot were you watching?

GERALD. Ah! Yes. Robert's coming, isn't he?

HELEN. Don't quarrel with him. Poor old mother won't like it, will you?

MRS. STRICKLAND. A little of it would be like old times.

GERALD. We were young savages. Twin brothers, too. Don't fear, mother—we shall be like brothers; we shall be brothers. I don't say we shall never disagree.

HELEN. Why should you agree any better than you did?

GERALD. Can you conceive a reason, Helen. [*They are silent, looking intently at him as he pauses and resumes.*] You've not seen Forbes Robertson play Romeo, mother. You did, Helen. You remember the quarrel. Tybalt wanted him to fight and he wouldn't. Why, he had Juliet! He couldn't quarrel. He was suffused, he was exalted, his head was among the stars. [*Gerald paces the length of the room declaiming very gently*]

“I do protest, I never injured thee;
But love thee better than thou canst devise
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love.”

[*He turns to face them.*] I'm like that.

HELEN. He killed Tybalt.

GERALD. Yes. Well, I don't think I shall kill Robert.

HELEN. It's a noble compliment to Georgie, anyhow.

GERALD. And why not? Isn't she noble?

HELEN. I don't know.

GERALD. Mother?

MRS. STRICKLAND. I don't know, dear.

GERALD. And I don't know. So why should you? You're generous, both of you. You've accepted her.

MRS. STRICKLAND. And we're not going back on her.

HELEN. I admire her very much, Gerald.

GERALD. Admire. Yes. The idea of her is tremendous. Even you see that. You hate her, of course.

HELEN. I don't, I don't, Gerald.

GERALD. Do you think her a nice girl, mother?

HELEN. Don't talk to mother as if she were a baby.

GERALD. Well, do you like her, mother?

MRS. STRICKLAND. She baffles me a little, dear, but you know best. You've been a good boy, a quiet, good boy—I've always trusted you. You don't—fall in love—lightly.

GERALD. Lightly? No.

MRS. STRICKLAND. We shall see her as you see her. We shall see her through your eyes.

GERALD. Ah! But that's no use, no use.

MRS. STRICKLAND. What do you want?

GERALD. I want impossibilities. I want you to be sure where I'm not sure myself. I don't know much about Georgie. I think I don't like a good deal of what I know. It's not fair to say so; it isn't fair. And yet I think it's true. I'm intoxicated I suppose. And I can see her as clearly and critically as you do. I can see the little coarsenesses; yes, there have been times when I seemed to see an ignominious little soul. There's more than that. That's not all.

Ah! she can be compassionate. I'm small beside her. She pitied me.

HELEN. Why?

GERALD. I am pitiful. I'm weak and ineffectual. She makes me strong. Don't think, mother, that this is just a sensual attraction. It's an adventure—an adventure of the spirit. I may come to wreck, but if you're safe there's no adventure.

HELEN. And she may come to wreck.

GERALD. Ah! But she has courage. She's adventuring too. You really consider me a safe, cautious person, mother?

MRS. STRICKLAND. You think her mean? You said ignominious.

HELEN. He says too much.

GERALD. She's many things. She's what I make her. She's a noble creature. She's a soul to be saved. Not the parson's way. Isn't it rather a poor sport to save souls when you're safe in the pulpit? I'm in the flood.

MRS. STRICKLAND. It sounds a little melodramatic, dear.

GERALD. Well, then, that's my fault. It's deadly earnest. I make it seem a bit florid.

HELEN. She makes it so.

GERALD. What?

HELEN. She's a bit florid.

GERALD. [*Passionately.*] That's cruel. Oh! that's cruel of you.

HELEN. Is it true?

GERALD. Of course. That's it.

HELEN. Well, if it's in your mind too——

GERALD. But to speak—to say it——

HELEN. Are you weighing all the words you say to mother and me?

GERALD. I've some sort of intention.

HELEN. What is it?

GERALD. To make you understand that I won't give her up. Mother says that she won't go back on her, but I know what you want. I tell you the worst I know or think because then you'll understand.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Have we ever asked you to give her up?

GERALD. You ask it at every hour of the day. Poor old dear! You look at me with beseeching eyes. It isn't that I'm stupid or callous. I'm extraordinarily happy, and I'm suffering all sorts of things. I know I owe something to you, mother.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You only owe it to me that you should think of what you're doing, that you should reason. You can't pray.

GERALD. If I were religious through and through and spent a year praying and fasting I should do it at the end. I'd marry her. But reasonably, mother—let's be reasonable—would you have me give her up? Why? How are such things done? Must I go to her and say that I've cooled when I haven't, or must I tell her that it's all strange and dangerous and that I daren't. Why! the poor girl's alone. Her people don't count. You see I've thought of these things. I've reasoned in a fashion.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Will she help you in your work?

GERALD. Oh! yes! You have me every way. She cares nothing for my work.

HELEN. And you don't care much for it.

GERALD. Not so much now.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Gerald, what you say is true. I've opposed it. [*She looks at Helen.*] We've opposed it. We won't any more.

HELEN. No Gerald.

GERALD. I suppose that ought to make me happy. And I'm grateful. I'm grateful to you both. You're astonishingly good about it. She'd like you if you'd let her.

[*He has his back to the garden entrance when Georgiana radiantly appears there. Helen sees her first and goes quickly to her with cordial greeting.*]

HELEN. Hullo! Georgie. Come on. We were just talking about you.

GEORGIE. [*She's a brave, handsome creature of rather high colourings and with a good deal of what is called animal spirits. So her wit lacks discretion and her abounding egoism makes her less than sensitive to the feelings of others.*] I thought for a moment you were going to kiss me.

HELEN. And I will. [*She does it gallantly.*]

MRS. STRICKLAND. Come and kiss me, my dear.

GEORGIE. Holy Moses!

GERALD. Damnation!

GEORGIE. For shame, Gerald! What's the matter?

GERALD. Why do you use such horrible expres-

sions? And at such a time, too, when we were all getting human.

HELEN. Never mind, Georgie. He's just a finicking literary man.

GEORGIE. Why! You swore. You swore before your mother.

GERALD. Swore! I used a natural, ordinary expression. I said what I felt.

GEORGIE. I used a natural, ordinary expression. And then you swear at me.

GERALD. I beg your pardon. But it wasn't a natural expression. That's what I object to.

GEORGIE. It was natural to me.

GERALD. It was facetious and artificial. It was horribly rough and crude.

HELEN. He's paying you subtle compliments, Georgie. He wants everything you say to be as beautiful as you are.

MRS. STRICKLAND. And you haven't kissed me yet, my dear.

[GEORGIE *hesitates and then goes to* MRS. STRICKLAND *with sullen submission*. MRS. STRICKLAND *pulls her down upon the sofa where she is sitting and embraces her*. GEORGIE *resists at first, then yields and sobs gently on* MRS. STRICKLAND'S *breast*. *The others look on silently for a short time*.

GERALD. I'm entirely in the wrong. I'm an irritable brute.

GEORGIE. [*Gently disengaging herself.*] No you

aren't. And I know it's not fair of me to cry. It was your mother. It made me feel soft. I know it was wrong to say "Holy Moses." Somehow it came out.

HELEN. Oh! You're generous.

GERALD. She is generous. That's it. She's generous. Beautiful and generous.

GEORGIE. [*Looking at him from the sofa where she still sits, but disengaged from MRS. STRICKLAND.*] And that's all?

GERALD. It's a great deal.

HELEN. Don't monopolize the virtues, Georgie. Let us quiet people have something of our own.

GEORGIE. Oh! but you're beautiful, and your mother—look at your mother. And generous? Of course you don't show anything. You wouldn't let your virtues be seen. Mighty superior. But I don't want to be nasty.

GERALD. You couldn't be if you tried.

GEORGIE. Going to make it up?

GERALD. You're not angry with me?

GEORGIE. No. I don't think it makes one angry to see things a bit clearer.

GERALD. Don't let's be too clear.

GEORGIE. You want to keep on being deluded?

GERALD. She's clever, isn't she, mother?

MRS. STRICKLAND. Another virtue for you, Georgie.

GEORGIE. He's thinking that he mustn't go too deep into me. I wish he wasn't a literary man. I'm afraid when his eye's on me.

GERALD. Now, now, now! The thing is to go deep and not to see quite clearly.

HELEN. He's getting harmless now. He's going to define literature and art for us.

MRS. STRICKLAND. We're waiting for our other boy, Georgie.

HELEN. He may be here soon.

GEORGIE. Oh, yes! [*To GERALD.*] And why haven't you gone to meet him?

MRS. STRICKLAND. We're not sure about his train.

GEORGIE. But he's been away for years, hasn't he?

GERALD. I might have missed you.

GEORGIE. But he's your brother. You ought to have gone.

GERALD. I know I ought.

GEORGIE. It's worse than "Holy Moses."

HELEN. And I ought to have gone—even on the chance.

GEORGIE. I wonder why you didn't.

HELEN. I'm just nursing a bit of resentment. You would have been more generous.

GERALD. I wonder how you'll get on with him?

HELEN. She'll get on with anybody.

GEORGIE. [*Lightly.*] Except Gerald. He doesn't appreciate me.

GERALD. I think you're an angel.

GEORGIE. Not so bad as that.

GERALD. I like my angels with a bit of devil in them.

GEORGIE. He's rich, isn't he?

HELEN. Robert? It seems so.

GERALD. Well, Georgie, that's one danger you'll escape with me.

GEORGIE. You'll never be rich?

GERALD. Do you want me to be?

GEORGIE. Well, why not?

HELEN. Don't get too noble, Gerald.

GERALD. It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle——

GEORGIE. Well? What?

GERALD. Than for a self-respecting literary man to make a pile of money.

GEORGIE. Stuff!

HELEN. [*Rapidly.*] Yes, I'm sure it's stuff, Georgie. He's going to make a fortune out of his next book.

MRS. STRICKLAND. And it's dedicated to you.

GEORGIE. Yes, I know. What does dedicate mean? How is it dedicated to me? Is it about me? Is it my sort? I've inspired it, have I? Write something that you'll sell a million of, and give me the money.

HELEN. Now, don't get exasperated.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Sententiously, and yet humorously.*] Money is the root of all evil, my dear.

GEORGIE. It's a root we have to live on.

GERALD. Only savages.

GEORGIE. Don't vex me, Gerald.

HELEN. You're a fiery young person.

GEORGIE. Oh! Helen, we're all wrong. I'm hopeless.

HELEN. I never liked you so much.

GEORGIE. Helen. Oh! Helen. [*She turns away in agitation.*]

HELEN. I've been a brute to you—a cold brute.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Everything is coming right, Georgie.

GEORGIE. I think you're frightfully—frightfully kind.

HELEN. Don't say frightfully; it's painful for Gerald.

GERALD. No, I like it.

MRS. STRICKLAND. What's that?

[*A pause as they listen. ROBERT enters through garden door, doffing and waving his Panama straw hat. He is dressed in light clothes. He is larger and stronger than GERALD, more assured, more habitually lively. His face is bronzed. He can relapse to something heavy and morose. GEORGIE has turned and walked a few paces towards the door, so that they face one another at close quarters. He throws down his hat and stands with arms outspread as though he would embrace her.*

ROBERT. It's not Helen; it's certainly not my mother; but what a delightful home-coming!

GEORGIE. [*In confusion.*] There's your mother.

ROBERT. [*Turning away with a shade of reluctance.*] Ah! mother. [*They embrace passionately. He holds her off to look at her with affection.*] You're just as you were. You're as good as ever. You make me wish I'd never gone away.

MRS. STRICKLAND. But you're back.

ROBERT. I'm back. Helen! [*Their embrace is*

almost cordial.] Well, Gerald. [*They shake hands.*]
Why didn't you come to meet me?

GERALD. You didn't say the train.

ROBERT. Didn't I? Fellow of the name of Bradshaw ought to have told you. I looked along the platform—well, never mind. My traps are on the way—I thought I'd walk. [*GEORGIE has kept in the background. ROBERT turns towards her and continues.*]
And now we come to——

MRS. STRICKLAND. This is Georgie, Robert.

ROBERT. Georgie? Oh, yes. You seem to have got into frocks, Georgie.

GEORGIE. Here's some one who will appreciate *my* jokes.

ROBERT. But Georgie isn't—who is Georgie?

HELEN. Can you really have forgotten that, Robert?

MRS. STRICKLAND. This is Gerald's Georgie.

HELEN. We told you all about it.

ROBERT. Did you? I don't seem to have heard much about her.

GEORGIE. They wouldn't write—much about me.

ROBERT. Why not?

HELEN. [*To GEORGIE.*] Now, don't be nasty.

GEORGIE. I forgot.

ROBERT. Well, *I* shan't forget again. [*To GEORGIE.*]
And so you're staying here?

GEORGIE. Down the lane. Not far away.

ROBERT. You're alone there?

GEORGIE. Yes.

ROBERT. Queer arrangement; but I suppose it's

not my business. Mayn't I go out and let Miss—Miss Georgie come here?

GERALD. Don't come plunging in, Robert—as you say, it's not your business.

ROBERT. No. Well, Georgie—may I call you so?—am I horribly cheeky?—you've heard all about me, I dare say. You've come in for the prodigal's return.

GEORGIE. But you're not a genuine prodigal.

ROBERT. So there's no fatted calf. Mother's glad to see me, though. Aren't you, mother?

MRS. STRICKLAND. I am, my dear boy.

ROBERT. I've sometimes thought of you, though I didn't write. It's different out there. The thing gets hold of you, or it doesn't. It got hold of me.

GEORGIE. And you got hold of it.

ROBERT. You mean?

GEORGIE. You've made yourself rich, haven't you?

ROBERT. Pretty well. I've not quite done yet. Have you made yourself rich, Gerald?

MRS. STRICKLAND. Gerald has just had an article in the *Quarterly Review*.

HELEN. The *English Review*, mother.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes, of course.

ROBERT. Really! Never heard of it. [*To GEORGIE.*] Do you read it?

GEORGIE. Sometimes. No; but I read his thing.

ROBERT. What is it about?

GEORGIE. What is it, Gerald? The influence of the romantic movement——

GERALD. [*Interrupting.*] Oh! What does it matter? He thinks the whole thing ridiculous.

ROBERT. No, no. It's queer though, to come home and find you just where you were.

GERALD. How do you know?

ROBERT. Well, when I went away you were bothering yourself about this magazine and that, and whether they would or they wouldn't, and—but perhaps you are making a big income?

HELEN. Really, Robert——

ROBERT. Oh! I'm sorry. But this is the kind of thing I want to know. Miss—Miss—Georgie——

GEORGIE. South.

ROBERT. South? Georgie South?

GEORGIE. Georgiana.

ROBERT. Splendid.

MRS. STRICKLAND. When did you have a meal, dear?

ROBERT. All right, I've lunched. [*To GEORGIE.*] You'll think I'm a boor, but I've been in a place where you ask when you want to know. I'm capable of asking *your* income. Love in a cottage? What?

HELEN. You're a savage, Robert.

ROBERT. Yes, I've no business among you literary folk. You'll post me up in the latest poets, Miss South?

GEORGIE. Bless you! I know nothing about them.

ROBERT. What! Gerald?

GERALD. Oh! don't be an ass.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Gerald! Gerald!

ROBERT. Ah! we used to quarrel like the devil.

You'll take my part, Georgie? It would spoil my fun if you were on his side.

GEORGIE. But, of course, I'm on his side.

ROBERT. But what about justice? If he should be in the wrong!

GEORGIE. What does that matter?

ROBERT. By Jove. That's the spirit. I admire you. Mustn't I say so, Gerald? Mustn't I show it? Don't look surly. You're lucky. I went away and worked like a hero—like a hero, Miss South;—I've done all sorts of things. It's a better plan just to stay at home and be lucky. I see that now.

HELEN. You've a reckless way of talking, Robert. Mother, just sit on him a little. He's too bumptious for anything.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Well, Robert, now give us some news.

ROBERT. News? I've no news.

HELEN. You must be able to tell us something of your life out there.

ROBERT. No, I think not.

HELEN. But, Robert, all sorts of strange things are in your mind that we want to know about. You must talk now you've come home.

ROBERT. [*Gloomily.*] You won't know what's in my mind—you wouldn't like it.

GERALD. It's a devilish place out there, isn't it?

ROBERT. [*With a quick glance at GEORGIE.*] No, not at all.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Well, my boy, we won't press you now.

ROBERT. [*Briskly.*] I tell you what, mother, I've brought some presents.

HELEN. Presents? Hurrah!

ROBERT. Wait, I'll get them. But my luggage hasn't come.

GERALD. I heard the cart come up. I think you'll find it in the hall or somewhere.

ROBERT. I know where some of the things are. I won't be a minute.

[*He goes out, taking his keys out of his pocket as he leaves the room. There is a short silence.*]

GEORGIE. He's older than you, Gerald?

GERALD. Half an hour.

GEORGIE. Twins! Oh! did you tell me? How different you are!

HELEN. Twins always are. In their minds at least.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You must come and stay with us now, Georgie. I think we can squeeze you in.

HELEN. Yes, do.

GERALD. Hadn't you better wait till Robert's gone, now.

HELEN. Why?

MRS. STRICKLAND. That would be a long time, I hope.

GERALD. He won't stay here long.

GEORGIE. How do you know?

MRS. STRICKLAND. He has come a long way to see us.

GERALD. Only from London, mother.

HELEN. What do you mean?

GERALD. Perhaps I'm wrong. I saw something in the paper about his company. I think he's come over to see the board.

GEORGIE. What is he? The chairman?

GERALD. Something above the chairman, I think.

MRS. STRICKLAND. He's changed. He's greatly changed.

GEORGIE. It's an unhealthy country?

MRS. STRICKLAND. Not where he is. No. And I think he's a good deal in the town.

GEORGIE. What town?

MRS. STRICKLAND. Mtambo. It's the port that the rubber comes to.

GERALD. It's all horrible. Don't let's talk of it.

GEORGIE. What nonsense, Gerald. What do you mean?

GERALD. There's nothing more horrible in the world than rubber. It's obscene stuff. It's like flesh. It's the flesh of devils.

HELEN. Steady, steady, Gerald.

GEORGIE. Whatever does he mean?

HELEN. He's a literary man. They think it's a reproach to be quite sane.

GEORGIE. I thought he was sane at least.

GERALD. Don't be vexed with me. I'm put off a little because Robert seems so beastly successful. It's mean. You don't mind my sticking in one place, do you?

GEORGIE. I don't see why you should.

HELEN. Poor Gerald's afraid you'll want *him* to get rich.

GEORGIE. I do want him to.

HELEN. Oh, but he'd be quite a different person.

GEORGIE. Don't you want him to be rich, Mrs. Strickland?

MRS. STRICKLAND. I like my sons as they are, my dear.

GEORGIE. But don't you want them to have success and—good fortune?

MRS. STRICKLAND. There are many kinds of success.

GEORGIE. [*She looks round at the three.*] Yes, I'm not good enough for you. I'm more his sort.

HELEN. What a stupid you are, Georgie. Gerald likes you because you're so different from him.

GEORGIE. I wonder if that's why I like Gerald.

GERALD. You do admit that you like me?

GEORGIE. I suppose I've persuaded myself so.

GERALD. Don't despise what I can do. I'll make you glorious yet.

HELEN. It can be done with a sonnet.

ROBERT. [*Entering with two or three parcels in his hands.*] Who's for gold and diamonds?

MRS. STRICKLAND. Well, you don't expect me to wear such things, surely.

ROBERT. Don't I? Look! This is for you.

[*He holds out a chain.*]

MRS. STRICKLAND. My dear! What is it?

ROBERT. Oh, it's gold, mainly. But it's a queer, barbaric thing. [*He hangs it round her neck. He leads her forward.*] Let's see how the old mother looks. It belonged to a sort of nigger queen.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Where is she?

ROBERT. Well, I think she's gathered to her—mothers.

MRS. STRICKLAND. It's a strange thing for me to wear. But thank you, my dear boy.

GERALD. By Jove! It's splendid. Look a bit more savage, mother.

HELEN. It's late for her to begin.

ROBERT. Now, Helen, here you are.

HELEN. What's this?

ROBERT. It's a kind of serpentine necklace. Rather pretty.

HELEN. We're quiet people, Robert. You're too gorgeous for us. Oh, but thank you, my dear. Mother, we seem to be play-acting. Look, Georgie! Oh, dear me! What shall I do with it in the bush?

ROBERT. In the bush?

HELEN. In New Zealand; yes. Don't say you didn't know I was going to New Zealand.

ROBERT. Of course, of course; yes. Fellow of the name of Tom you're going to marry. I remember.

HELEN. I should think so.

GEORGIE. What's it like? What is it you're going to?

HELEN. Well, it's the bush. Tom's a bush farmer. It's a kind of thicket—big trees and little. They hack a lot of it down, and when it's dry they burn it. They devastate the land; they make a black wilderness; but it all comes right again.

GEORGIE. And the people?

HELEN. I suppose we shall be miles away from people at first.

GEORGIE. All alone with Tom?

HELEN. But I rather like the idea of it.

ROBERT. Yes, but what's the upshot? What can you make of it? How does it pay?

HELEN. I think a bare living's safe. There may be a little over.

ROBERT. Can such things be?

HELEN. A dinner of herbs where love is, Robert.

GERALD. It's beautiful. The idea of it is beautiful.

ROBERT. Ah! yes—the idea.

GEORGIE. I wish I were you, Helen.

HELEN. Why? Would you like it?

GEORGIE. No, no, no. I don't want to be in your place. I want to be you. To think like you. I like you so much better than myself.

ROBERT. We can do with several kinds—what, Gerald? Now then, here's something for you.

[*He gives GERALD a parcel.*]

GERALD. [*Undoing it.*] My dear chap, it's awfully good of you. What the Dickens is this? Very ornamental, very unusual.

ROBERT. It's a cigar-case.

GERALD. Of course. Yes. Very jolly.

ROBERT. There's a peculiarity about it that you may not notice.

GERALD. What's that?

ROBERT. Nice flexible leather?

GERALD. Yes.

ROBERT. Human.

GERALD. What?

ROBERT. It's made from human skin.

GERALD. [*Throwing it down.*] You knew I should hate it. That's why you gave it me. Take your beastly things back to your beastly country.

ROBERT. Nonsense. How was I to know——

GEORGIE. Don't be absurd, Gerald.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Gerald!

HELEN. But it's rather horrid, Robert, isn't it?

ROBERT. People think nothing of it out there.

HELEN. We aren't out there.

ROBERT. [*To GEORGIE.*] Do you think I meant to offend him?

GEORGIE. I don't know. Perhaps you did. That's no reason for his acting like a fool.

GERALD. A fool?

GEORGIE. You should apologize.

GERALD. To Robert?

ROBERT. Never mind. Never mind.

GERALD. Mother, should I?

MRS. STRICKLAND. It was not a nice present for you, but Robert didn't understand that.

GERALD. Robert, I beg your pardon.

[*He picks up the cigar-case and puts it on a table.*]

ROBERT. All right, my boy.

GEORGIE. Well, I suppose you've nothing for me?

ROBERT. Heavens! But I didn't know about you.

GEORGIE. So I go empty-handed——

ROBERT. I've nothing but a ring.

GEORGIE. A ring?

ROBERT. And that I brought for my wife.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Your wife!

HELEN. What?

ROBERT. Now, mother, don't be alarmed. I didn't mean that I have a wife. But I thought while I was over, I might look round for one. And I've brought a ring for her.

GEORGIE. Let's see.

ROBERT. You'd better not.

GEORGIE. Why?

ROBERT. It's a magnificent ring; it's a great ring.

GEORGIE. You've to bid high for a wife to go out there?

ROBERT. Even there it's better than bush farming. And it won't be for long.

GEORGIE. Why not?

ROBERT. A year or two more and then—where does one settle down? Park Lane?

GEORGIE. Park Lane! Are you as rich as that?

ROBERT. She might not want to come back. Out there she'll be a little queen.

HELEN. Don't be flamboyant, Robert.

GEORGIE. And what are you? Are you a little king out there?

ROBERT. I've more power than a king.

GEORGIE. Fancy that!

ROBERT. The kings there are our slaves.

GERALD. Slaves!

ROBERT. Figuratively speaking.

GEORGIE. You haven't shown us the ring.

ROBERT. Would you really like to see it?

GEORGIE. Yes, yes.

ROBERT. It may dazzle you.

[He takes a case from his pocket, opens it and shows it to her. She gazes at it as the curtain descends.]

ACT II

The same. About a fortnight later. The table has been brought near to the centre and to the audience, and is spread for breakfast. MRS. STRICKLAND and HELEN are seated at it. HELEN opens and reads a letter or two. Her mother sits idle, gazing fixedly before her, and HELEN glances at her once or twice. Letters, papers, and a parcel are disposed about the table. Chairs are set. MRS. STRICKLAND and HELEN proceed languidly with breakfast.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Rousing herself.*] They know we're breakfasting here?

HELEN. Anyway, they'll soon find out.

MRS. STRICKLAND. What time did Robert get back last night?

HELEN. By the last train. He got here about twelve.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes, I needn't have asked you. I heard him come in. Was Gerald up?

HELEN. No, he'd gone to bed.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*After a short pause, and rather irritably.*] Yes, I knew that too. Tell me something.

HELEN. Well, we didn't talk much, Robert and I.

MRS. STRICKLAND. He was tired?

HELEN. He seemed in very good spirits.

MRS. STRICKLAND. It's strange that he should be so.

HELEN. Yes, mother, it is strange.

MRS. STRICKLAND. He told you nothing more?

HELEN. Nothing. I was miserable and I felt—powerless. I'm stronger now.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You don't get much strength from a sleepless night.

HELEN. I slept, mother—pretty well.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I don't exactly sleep, but I dream.

HELEN. I think I'll come and sleep with you to-night.

MRS. STRICKLAND. But it's a long time till night.

HELEN. [*She rises and stands beside her mother, touching her shoulder.*] My poor dear, I'm afraid I encourage you to make too much of it. We must get Robert away. Yes, their bickering is abominable. Gerald sees that, but he can't control himself. Ah, well! I'm going to talk to some of them to-day.

MRS. STRICKLAND. To Georgie?

HELEN. I'm sorry for Georgie.

[*GEORGIE enters from the garden.*]

GEORGIE. Breakfast here? Good morning.

HELEN. Hullo! Georgie.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Good morning, dear. We breakfast here in the summer sometimes. It's more cheerful.

HELEN. We decided to be cheerful.

GEORGIE. Well, it's beautiful this morning.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You'll have some breakfast?

HELEN. Do, Georgie.

GEORGIE. I've had it. I've had all I want, thank you.

HELEN. Then you won't think it inhospitable if I remark that you are early.

GEORGIE. I felt I must get it done with. I'd made up my mind and I came to tell you.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*With agitation.*] What?

GEORGIE. Oh, it's not important. It's only that I'm going away. I thought I'd come and say good-bye and get off.

MRS. STRICKLAND. What does it mean?

GEORGIE. I don't know that it means anything.

MRS. STRICKLAND. But why must you—why must you——

HELEN. Let her go home and be quiet for a bit, mother.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I want to know. I want to know.

HELEN. Now, mother, don't make poor Georgie define things. Don't let's define things. Go, Georgie, and then in a week or two you'll come back. And you're to come and stay here. We're not going to be shockingly rude to you any more, are we, mother?

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes, yes. You must come here, my dear. And I know—yes, I know—that it's been made very difficult for you—very difficult. I blame myself and I blame—others.

GEORGIE. Yes, I know you blame me——

MRS. STRICKLAND. I didn't mean you.

GEORGIE. And Helen despises me.

HELEN. No I don't,

GEORGIE. You ought to, then.

HELEN. I'm sorry I can't oblige you, you silly girl.

[ROBERT enters. *He kisses his mother and nods to HELEN.*

ROBERT. [*To GEORGIE.*] So you're here. I wanted to see you. Always do, though.

HELEN. She's going away.

ROBERT. What?

GERALD. [*Entering.*] Who's going away?

GEORGIE. I am. I'm going home.

ROBERT. We'll talk about that presently.

GERALD. [*He kisses his mother.*] I hope you've slept, dear.

MRS. STRICKLAND. All right. Oh, yes!

HELEN. Now, boys—breakfast. Georgie, have a cup of tea?

ROBERT. Coffee. Tea's for nervous, decadent people—like Gerald.

GEORGIE. Neither, thanks.

HELEN. Now, Robert; no nonsense to-day or we'll turn you out.

[*They settle to the table. GEORGIE takes a chair near. Breakfast proceeds. ROBERT looks at a letter; glancing from it he sees GERALD pick up the parcel.*

ROBERT. What's that?

GERALD. Do you want to know?

ROBERT. As you like.

GERALD. It's my novel come back.

ROBERT. Rejected?

GERALD. Yes.

MRS. STRICKLAND. But, Gerald, how do you know? There may be a note inside to say they'll accept it.

GERALD. No, mother.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Well, Robert, I hope you got on nicely in London yesterday.

ROBERT. Yes, I got my way.

HELEN. With the directors and people?

ROBERT. Yes.

GERALD. He always gets his way.

HELEN. And does it mean a few more millions of pounds for you?

ROBERT. Well, call it thousands.

GERALD. I'm sick of his money.

ROBERT. You'll never be sick of money.

HELEN. Stop, Robert. We're getting sick of you. You get on mother's nerves. You irritate us all. It's our fault perhaps, but we were quiet before you came. Won't you go? It's a horrible thing to ask you. Of course we want you to come back presently, but don't you see that we can't go on like this?

ROBERT. Oh! That's it?

MRS. STRICKLAND. No, Robert. Don't listen to her.

ROBERT. You hear what mother says.

HELEN. Mothers will say anything.

ROBERT. A little more coffee, please—unless you've stopped supplies.

HELEN. I'll put poison in, if you stay here much longer.

ROBERT. [*Good-humouredly.*] Where am I to go?

HELEN. Stay with some of those millionaire friends.

ROBERT. You want me to set out in my search for that wife?

HELEN. Yes, Robert.

ROBERT. You think I shall never find her by staying here?

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*To GERALD.*] What is there in the paper this morning, I wonder.

GERALD. The paper? Oh, yes. [*He takes it up, unfolds it, and glances over the columns perfunctorily.*]

ROBERT. Ah! What's happening? What are they talking about this time? And who's doing anything? [*He turns suddenly to GEORGIE.*] You're going? When?

GEORGIE. This morning.

ROBERT. I mustn't ask why?

GEORGIE. You needn't.

ROBERT. Home?

GEORGIE. That's it.

ROBERT. What's it like—your home?

MRS. STRICKLAND. Really, Robert——

ROBERT. Now, mother, we're all interested in her. Why shouldn't she tell us what she will? I want to know who her people are and what they're like. Does Gerald know?

GERALD. [*He has become intent upon the newspaper.*] This is curious.

HELEN. What is it?

ROBERT. A new poet?

GERALD. What do you call the place where that great plantation of yours is?

ROBERT. Why do you ask?

GERALD. Do you know a rubber company called the Loka Mindi?

ROBERT. Yes.

GERALD. Their place near to yours?

ROBERT. It is. Some of the land's adjoining.

GERALD. Yes? Similar kind of thing to yours, I suppose?

ROBERT. Well, it's all rubber. Yes.

GERALD. [*Looking at the paper again.*] Horrible! Horrible!

ROBERT. Here's a fellow who'll pick a quarrel with india-rubber.

MRS. STRICKLAND. What is the matter, Gerald?

HELEN. Now, Gerald, mother asked you for the news. She doesn't care about rubber companies. What is the great world doing?

MRS. STRICKLAND. What is the subject of the Parliamentary debate?

GERALD. Robert, I'm not treating you fairly. I beg your pardon. I was leading you on. Of course, your company is not the same kind of thing at all.

ROBERT. How d'you know? What are you talking about?

GERALD. Another time. I wonder if I want an egg.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Some more coffee, dear?

ROBERT. Give me that paper.

HELEN. It's not very polite to read the paper at breakfast, you boys. And a visitor, too.

GEORGIE. I'll be going.

ROBERT. [*To GERALD.*] What are you hinting at?

[*He seizes the paper and searches its columns, presently concentrating on a passage.*]

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*To GEORGIE.*] What time is your train, dear?

[*GEORGIE is watching ROBERT, and does not hear.*]

HELEN. Wake up! Georgie. Mother's talking to you.

GEORGIE. I beg your pardon.

ROBERT. I see, I see. [*To GERALD.*] You think you'll get an advantage out of this, do you?

GERALD. No. I see now that I should hate to do it.

MRS. STRICKLAND. What is it, Gerald? Robert, what is it?

ROBERT. [*To GEORGIE.*] You want to know?

GEORGIE. Yes.

HELEN. This is really very portentous.

GERALD. It's nothing. Get on with your breakfast.

ROBERT. Stab and run away!

GERALD. What's that?

HELEN. For shame, Robert!

MRS. STRICKLAND. Oh! for heaven's sake say what it is——

GERALD. Mother, it's merely that I saw something in the paper about this rubber company. It's not Robert's company.

MRS. STRICKLAND. What does it say?

ROBERT. Oh, it's the philanthropists. It's this lovely Exeter Hall lot. It's the stay-at-homes. They're out to protect the immaculate black man.

HELEN. And shouldn't he be protected?

MRS. STRICKLAND. I'm sure that Robert would not do anything that was—inconsiderate.

HELEN. No, mother.

GEORGIE. You haven't told us what it is.

ROBERT. Let the minor poet tell you.

GERALD. Nobody's accusing you.

ROBERT. You'd like to.

GERALD. Do you know these ruffians?

ROBERT. Who says they're ruffians?

GERALD. If half of what is set down there is true—and they acknowledge it, they admit the essential things—if half of it's true——

HELEN. Gerald!

GERALD. It's no use, Helen. Let him deny it; let him disclaim it. These men are guilty of atrocious crimes.

HELEN. Robert is not.

ROBERT. No, but I'm not going to pretend that I'm smug and soft like him. D'you think we run the big world like a Sunday-school? I went out there to work, and I did work, early and late. I carried my life in my hands. I've done lots of things that you wouldn't like—any of you. It's damned fine to boast of your clean hands when you've done nothing.

GERALD. What is it that you've done?

HELEN. Stop this, Gerald.

MRS. STRICKLAND. They can't stop now.

GERALD. Have you tortured and mauled these poor devils too? Is that how you grew rich?

ROBERT. That's it. That's the offence. We grow rich. And then comes a pack of lying missionaries

and newspapers, and the fat's in the fire. Where would you be without us? Where would your trade be and your Empire? Oh, yes, but there's a beggarly native somewhere who hasn't had strict justice. I'm not to a nigger or two. Georgie, don't be afraid. No. You'll understand.

GERALD. Yes. Listen, Georgie.

ROBERT. Mother, I wish you weren't here.

HELEN. But she is here.

ROBERT. Ah! yes, Helen. I've some respect for you—you and your bush farming. It's honest work if it's not a big adventure. You're good for that and other women—other women—they'll understand me.

MRS. STRICKLAND. But, Robert, you have done nothing wrong?

ROBERT. Mother, the ways of this house are not my ways. My morals are not yours.

MRS. STRICKLAND. But there aren't two kinds of morals.

GERALD. Answer that.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I don't mean, my dear boy, that I think you've done anything wrong.

ROBERT. I've done fifty things that you would think wrong. Every man who is a man does things that would horrify his mother.

HELEN. Why do you say so here?

ROBERT. It's that fellow; he exasperates me. He stays at home making pretty little rhymes and writing stories that nobody will print. I'm better than he at least. What have you done? What have you to

show? He sits twiddling his thumbs and writing bawdy little tales.

HELEN. You've said enough.

ROBERT. Yes, let him have his turn. Make your bid—make your bid for a wife. Listen to him now, Georgie.

HELEN. Do you say all this to her?

ROBERT. I'm glad she's here. [*To GERALD.*] Come, speak up! Defend yourself.

GERALD. What! Am *I* on my defence?

GEORGIE. Yes, I want you to speak.

GERALD. But you—you mean——

GEORGIE. Oh! Don't submit. Answer him. Attack him. Do something.

GERALD. Yes, yes. [*He turns to ROBERT.*] Do you mean to say— [*He trails off stammering and looks with bewilderment and apprehension at GEORGIE.*] What is it you want?

ROBERT. Give him a little time and pen and paper.

GERALD. [*To HELEN.*] What does she want?

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Sternly.*] I think that this is an indecent scene.

ROBERT. Let's end it, then.

GEORGIE. I'll go.

HELEN. Wait, Georgie; wait a moment. You think he's silenced Gerald. You're not fair.

GEORGIE. What's the good of my being fair?

HELEN. Gerald doesn't speak because he knows how hopeless it is to make you understand.

GERALD. No. She can understand.

HELEN. She listened to Robert. She's against you.

GERALD. No, no.

HELEN. What Robert said of Gerald is abominable and untrue. How can he defend himself from sneers? He's too fine for this rough talk. It's easy to hurt him. He's wrong to quarrel with Robert as he does, but who could help it? Georgie, you've been unkind, you've been disloyal.

GEORGIE. I can't help it.

HELEN. Oh! Can't you see what Gerald is? He could be brave and adventurous. That's just clumsy work. You think he sits at home bothering over futilities? The finest men in the world are doing little things that people like Robert laugh at.

ROBERT. Bravo, Helen! Quite a good case. You did well to leave it to her.

HELEN. It isn't his failure, Georgie, it's yours.

GEORGIE. Oh! I know that.

ROBERT. Yes, it's just that we're not his kind.

GEORGIE. Don't assume too much.

HELEN. Georgie, I've not been good to you all along. I'm ready to like you. I'll love you.

GEORGIE. I'm not your sort.

HELEN. We don't only want one sort.

GEORGIE. It's a pity you ever saw me—any of you——

HELEN. My dear, you have done us a world of good.

ROBERT. [*To GEORGIE.*] They might have gone on thinking me an exemplary character but for you.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Rising.*] If we've all finished—Robert, I'll ask you to give your old mother your arm round the garden.

ROBERT. [*Bowing.*] Thank you, mother.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You won't horrify me?

ROBERT. That was a joke.

[*MRS. STRICKLAND and ROBERT go out together into the sunny garden.*]

HELEN. I must look after a few things.

GEORGIE. And I must go.

HELEN. Don't go yet.

GEORGIE. I don't want to talk to Gerald now. It's no good.

HELEN. Be a good girl. Be a sensible girl. I can't give you any more heroics. I must go.

[*She goes through the door to the left.*]

GEORGIE. Good-bye, Gerald.

GERALD. It isn't as bad as that, is it?

GEORGIE. I think it must come to that.

GERALD. It shan't come to that.

GEORGIE. I feel like Helen. I can't do with any more heroics. I want to get away.

GERALD. Why should you expect heroics from me? You don't think me heroical.

GEORGIE. Sham heroics, then.

GERALD. That's too bad.

GEORGIE. Yes, it is, Gerald. I didn't mean it. It just slipped out. I am sorry.

GERALD. It's to be pity now, is it?

GEORGIE. [*With an hysterical little laugh.*] Well they say pity's akin to love.

GERALD. Yes, you pitied me on the way to love; you pity me on the way back.

GEORGIE. I'm not a woman to love through pity.

GERALD. You've contempt for me? You think I'm a small, mean creature beside him?

GEORGIE. No. You and Helen are all right. I heard what she said about you.

GERALD. Don't leave me. Don't give me up.

GEORGIE. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm horribly sorry.

GERALD. No, no. Don't say that. Don't be sorry. I'm not a man to despise. I'm trying for big things in my own way. And I can give you what nobody else can.

GEORGIE. What's that?

GERALD. Oh, you'll laugh at me when I say that I'm a poet. But you shouldn't; you mustn't. I'll make you see. You're mad to reject me. You're nothing without me. I can appreciate you. Yes, I can love you as a woman should be loved. Why! We are lovers. Don't you remember? Don't you remember?

GEORGIE. I remember, but it doesn't make me excited now. I'm as cold as a stone.

GERALD. He's set you against me.

GEORGIE. Let me go. I won't stay.

GERALD. Is it himself? Is it his diamonds and motor-cars? Are you like that? Could I learn to despise you?

GEORGIE. You've always despised me. You always knew that it was impossible. You don't want me. You want something that you pretend I am.

GERALD. No, no, no. It's you.

GEORGIE. Would you love me whatever I did?

GERALD. Yes.

GEORGIE. If I tortured and shot down those niggers? If I were cruel and dreadful as you think he is?

GERALD. You couldn't. You couldn't be that.

GEORGIE. How can you know me? I don't know myself. When he spoke just now I gloried in it. My heart went out to him, I tell you. I know it's wrong. I'm wicked, if you like. I don't justify it, but how can I help it? Of course, I'm bound to you. I suppose it's shocking and dishonourable to cry off.

GERALD. Good heavens! Do you think I'd marry you against your will?

GEORGIE. You release me then? Thank you, thank you, Gerald. You're very well out of it. I'm fickle, you see; I was never the girl for you. I knew that all the time, but I liked you very, very much. I do like you. I'm grateful to you. You let me off then? I can tell Helen that?

GERALD. Let you off? Yes. But I mean to marry you yet.

GEORGIE. [*Laughing.*] Ah! You may try. You've made me almost happy. And I like you so much better now I'm free.

GERALD. I want to make a condition.

GEORGIE. [*Sharply.*] What's that?

GERALD. That you don't engage yourself to marry Robert for three months.

GEORGIE. Is that fair?

GERALD. I can't be fair to him.

GEORGIE. I don't like you now. You're not

generous. And I don't think—I don't think I shall ever marry Robert.

GERALD. Promise it then.

GEORGIE. I think you're rather mean.

GERALD. It's not for myself; it's for you. Don't you see that? I'm thinking of you.

GEORGIE. I hate to think of you and him as you are, quarrelling and sneering. And he's strong and dangerous.

GERALD. Dangerous?

GEORGIE. You can't stand against him.

GERALD. Do you think I'm afraid?

GEORGIE. It would be better if you were. I should never have felt safe if I had married you.

GERALD. What? Is that it? I don't let you off then. Afraid?

GEORGIE. No, no. What a fool I am to tell you this! That's nothing. That's just a fancy. Ah! Don't let's begin all over again.

GERALD. You accept that condition?

GEORGIE. No, but I'm going away. Where's Helen? I must say good-bye to her. I feel as though I might never see her again.

GERALD. My dear girl, what nonsense!

GEORGIE. I know. But that's how I feel. I suppose she's somewhere in the house.

[GEORGIE passes out through the door on the left while GERALD stares after her. As he turns ROBERT enters from the garden.]

ROBERT. Was that Georgie?

GERALD. Yes.

ROBERT. Been having a talk?

GERALD. As you see.

ROBERT. Are you still engaged to her?

GERALD. Yes. I consider myself so.

ROBERT. What does that mean?

GERALD. She is not engaged to me.

ROBERT. Ah! That's sensible. Now, look here! I don't see that there's any good in our scrapping before the old lady. I'm ready to be civil if you are. You've said some ugly things about me; we've not spared one another. Damn it, man, we're brothers. Let's be a little more charitable.

GERALD. You feel like that—even you. Yes, you've got a bit of common humanity. It's rather interesting.

ROBERT. I don't know what you're driving at. Remember I'm a plain man.

GERALD. You begin to feel benevolent, don't you? You think you've got her.

ROBERT. Well, you are out of the way, anyhow.

GERALD. Don't be too sure.

ROBERT. What do you mean to do?

GERALD. Anything I can to thwart you.

ROBERT. What?

GERALD. Oh, you're vulnerable. You're not clear of this rubber affair yet.

ROBERT. You fool. You're a spiteful fool.

GERALD. I'll save her if I can.

ROBERT. From what?

GERALD. From you.

ROBERT. Take care, my friend. Take care.

GERALD. Do you think I'm afraid of you?

ROBERT. You might have cause to be.

GERALD. I'm not one of your niggers.

ROBERT. You're a natural slave. You're one of the under-men. Come, you're beaten. She prefers me.

GERALD. Poor girl! She has a coarse side.

ROBERT. [*Approaches him closely.*] You dare to insult her?

[*At a movement of GERALD'S ROBERT clutches his wrist.*]

GERALD. Take your hand off or I'll strike you.

ROBERT. If you do, I think I shall kill you.

[*As they confront one another MRS. STRICKLAND enters. They fall apart.*]

MRS. STRICKLAND. I heard. I heard. And I saw.

GERALD. It's all right, mother; there's no harm done.

MRS. STRICKLAND. No harm? Is this no harm?

GERALD. Yes, you're right. The sooner Robert and I part, the better. The less we see of one another, the better.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes, but I can never forget this. You looked at one another like murderers. My sons, my two boys. You've given me something to dream about—and to think about as I lie awake.

ROBERT. Yes, yes. We oughtn't to have let you catch us. We were a bit vexed with one another.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Will you do something for me—both of you?

ROBERT. What is it?

MRS. STRICKLAND. It's no use saying "Love one another," but will you shake hands? Will you promise that you won't—that you'll try not to quarrel?

ROBERT. [*After a pause, to GERALD.*] Well, what do you say?

GERALD. Do you know what he has done? He has taken her from me.

ROBERT. Oh, you do admit it, then?

GERALD. [*Passionately.*] Don't speak to me.

ROBERT. Do you know what he wants to do? To ruin me. Fortunately, he can't.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes, you care for your own grievances—not for me.

GERALD. Mine's a pretty big grievance, mother.

ROBERT. So is mine.

GERALD. It's useless to pretend that we can ever be like brothers again. Look here, mother! I'll promise to try to avoid him—not to pick a quarrel with him.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Will you promise not to attack him, not to try to damage him, not to revenge?

GERALD. [*He looks fixedly at his mother and then takes his eyes off her and stares into vacancy.*] I'll promise that.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Thank you, Gerald. It's cold comfort, but thank you. [*She looks at each of them wistfully and turns away.*] Really, it's time these breakfast things were removed.

[*GERALD lights a cigarette and strolls into the garden. HELEN and GEORGIE enter through the other door.*]

GEORGIE. Good-bye, Mrs. Strickland.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Good-bye. [*They shake hands.*]

GEORGIE. [*To ROBERT.*] Good-bye.

ROBERT. I'll walk with you.

GEORGIE. Please don't.

ROBERT. Very well. I'll speak to you here.

HELEN. Let her go.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes, Robert. Let her go now.

ROBERT. [*To GEORGIE.*] I want five minutes' talk.

GEORGIE. [*To HELEN.*] What must I say?

ROBERT. We're not children.

[*He stands his ground resolutely.*]

HELEN. Come, mother.

[*She takes MRS. STRICKLAND'S arm and they go out by the door at left.*]

ROBERT. Now.

GEORGIE. I beg you to let me go.

ROBERT. Never.

GEORGIE. It's all mad and dreadful. You terrify me. It's not fair.

ROBERT. [*He seizes her hands.*] Listen to me!

GEORGIE. Stand away then.

ROBERT. It can only end one way. My love! You're mine.

GEORGIE. [*Resisting.*] No, no, no. She'll hate me. They'll all hate me.

ROBERT. Ah! But I'll love you.

GEORGIE. I hate myself. And I'm afraid. I'm afraid of you. I shall have no peace.

ROBERT. You love me.

GEORGIE. But I don't understand. I may come

to hate you. I'm selling myself to you. You're rich.

ROBERT. [*Releasing her.*] What!

GEORGIE. No, no. That isn't true. It isn't true, Robert. I wanted to be free for a moment. Just for a moment. Let me think a little.

ROBERT. [*With the ring in his hand.*] Take this.

GEORGIE. What? Oh, no. Not the ring. No. [*He is forcing it upon her when she seizes it and throws it down. She breaks away and stands swaying. He catches her in his arms. She sinks sobbing upon his breast.*] I'm afraid. I'm afraid.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT III

The same scene. About two years later. There are a few changes in the disposition of the furniture, etc.

HELEN enters from the garden dressed for out of doors.

HELEN. [*Crossing towards the door on the spectator's left.*] Mother, where are you? [MRS. STRICKLAND comes through the door before she reaches it.] Oh, mother, they did not come by that train.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*She appears older, anxious, oppressed by apprehensions.*] I know, my dear. A telegram came after you'd started. I was so sorry. They're not coming from Southampton, it seems. They're coming from London.

HELEN. Oh, bother! I might have waited. [*She looks at her watch.*] They should be here directly, driving. Now, mother, have you had a rest? Did you lie down?

MRS. STRICKLAND. I couldn't rest. Helen, we ought not to have let Gerald go.

HELEN. Now, now, don't go back to that.

MRS. STRICKLAND. My conscience isn't clear.

HELEN. You couldn't have prevented him.

MRS. STRICKLAND. He was always more tractable than Robert.

HELEN. Don't talk of it now.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I must talk of something. I can't just wait.

HELEN. Well, then, talk away, dear.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Helen, have you realized that they've come through those strange parts of Africa together—the voyage together——

HELEN. Robert would see them off from Mtambo.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You think they're all—reconciled? Do you? Do you, Helen? It's too good to be true.

HELEN. You'll know all about it in ten minutes.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Ten minutes is a long time. And now I wish it were longer. I wish it were a month or a year. I don't want to know anything. I only want to have my children about me.

HELEN. [*Petting her.*] Now, it's all right. Robert's busy. Georgie wanted a holiday and there was Gerald handy. It's all perfectly reasonable. Now don't be a goose and look at them as though there was something improper about it.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I wish I could have seen her letter to him.

HELEN. What letter?

MRS. STRICKLAND. When she asked him to go. The day when I thought—I thought he had been drinking.

HELEN. It's all right, mother. I'm sure it's all right.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You know it's not all right.

HELEN. [*Raising her head to listen, she approaches*

the garden door. With a backward look at her mother she hastens out.] Hullo! They're here.

[MRS. STRICKLAND approaches the door and hesitates. She returns to the middle of the room. She sits down for a moment and almost immediately rises. She is intensely agitated. She is making for the garden door again when HELEN first, then GEORGIE, and last GERALD enter. GERALD is in dark clothes and GEORGIE in black, though not in what is called deep mourning.]

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*As she catches sight of GEORGIE.*] Where is Robert? Where is Robert?

HELEN. [*She approaches her mother and takes her arm.*] Sit down, mother.

[MRS. STRICKLAND, shaking off HELEN, confronts the others and then sits down suddenly. GERALD walks to her and stands before her.]

GERALD. Mother, Robert is dead.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*With a frightened air.*] Yes—yes.

HELEN. You should have told us. You should not have left her in this suspense.

GERALD. You mean the cable?

HELEN. Yes.

GERALD. I did tell you. My message was tampered with.

HELEN. How could that be?

GERALD. There's a good deal to explain.

HELEN. [*Looking at her mother.*] Tell her that first.

GERALD. Mother, the message that I sent told you

of Robert's death. It went through the company's hands at Mtambo. They took out the part that referred to him. I've just learnt that at the London office.

HELEN. But why?

GERALD. They didn't want the news to get out. It's abominable. It would have brought down the value of their shares.

HELEN. But it must get out.

GERALD. They wanted time. Of course the news was cabled to the London office.

HELEN. You see, mother, Gerald thought we knew.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Yes—yes. Did he die—peacefully?

GERALD. It was a sudden death. Sudden deaths are best.

HELEN. [*As he pauses.*] Give the facts—how it happened.

GERALD. It was a mutiny of the labourers on the plantation. Robert was shot.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*To GEORGIE.*] Were you there? [*GEORGIE shakes her head.*] Are you sure he's dead? Do you know how he died?

GERALD. I was there.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You defended him?

GERALD. It was very sudden; there was no time.

MRS. STRICKLAND. You should not have gone. You should never have gone.

HELEN. The man who killed him—did you know him? Was it just a chance?

GERALD. The man's dead.

HELEN. You killed him?

GERALD. Yes.

HELEN. [*Rather bitterly.*] There, mother! Does that please you?

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Looking at GEORGIE.*] Make her speak.

GEORGIE. Are we on our trial?

GERALD. [*With a deprecating, impatient gesture.*] Oh! [*After a moment's pause.*] Georgie has had a terrible time.

GEORGIE. Gerald saved me.

MRS. STRICKLAND. From what?

GERALD. This mutiny was an ugly affair. We had to defend ourselves. There were only two or three Europeans. We had an awful job to get away.

GEORGIE. Gerald was a hero. You would have been proud of him.

HELEN. What did he do?

GEORGIE. It isn't only what he did. Look at him, Helen. Are you stupid? Don't you see?

HELEN. [*She looks from one to the other.*] Perhaps, Gerald, you had better tell mother how Robert was killed. It has to be done.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Quickly.*] Not now.

HELEN. Very well; not now.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I'll go and lie down on my bed for a little.

HELEN. Yes; come on.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I don't want you, Helen.

[*She goes out, and HELEN with a glance at the others follows her. GEORGIE and GERALD, left together, stand rather stiffly.*]

GEORGIE. [*Looking about the room.*] It doesn't change.

GERALD. Do you find her changed?

GEORGIE. Your mother? She's a great deal older.

GERALD. I don't quite understand her.

GEORGIE. Helen is going to be very hard on me.

GERALD. Why did you say that about being on our trial?

GEORGIE. Isn't it true?

GERALD. True! What have we to do with truth?

GEORGIE. Take care. I can't bear much more.

GERALD. [*Taking her hand and kissing it impulsively.*] Dear heart, I'll spare you all I can. Or I'll tell you——

GEORGIE. Tell me nothing.

GERALD. You shrink from me.

GEORGIE. No, no. I don't. Not I, myself. I'm afraid of Helen. I'm timid.

GERALD. We mustn't be timid.

GEORGIE. I wish we were back there. Yes, in Africa. I could crawl at your feet when I look at this room. But you were different then, weren't you? Let's get away from this cold place. They look at us strangely. Africa. I hated it, but I found you there. And I almost hated you because you made me come on. Why didn't you let us die in peace? How you hounded me on, Gerald! And it was glorious that you loved me so much as that. So I came on. Why did we come here? We don't belong to this now. I'm afraid of Helen!

[HELEN enters, looking at them curiously.]

HELEN. [To GEORGIE.] You'd like to go to your room.

GEORGIE. There's no hurry.

HELEN. I want to talk to Gerald.

GEORGIE. Mayn't I stay?

HELEN. No.

GEORGIE. You're not kind to me.

HELEN. I'm sorry. I've no time. Please go. The room over the porch. You know.

[She goes reluctantly. HELEN watches the door shut.]

GERALD. You must remember that she has endured a great deal. She's terribly shaken.

HELEN. Yes. Now, Gerald, tell me all about this as quickly as you can. Mother's restless; she may be here any minute. If you've anything to hide, don't hide it from me, and we'll see what's best to be done.

GERALD. Hide! What do you mean?

HELEN. You've nothing to hide? I can thank God, then.

GERALD. What is it you suspect?

HELEN. Tell your tale. Let me hear it all. I want to hear it before she does.

GERALD. She evidently doesn't want to hear yet—the details.

HELEN. She's burning to hear them—she's consumed with curiosity. Who would not be?

GERALD. Well, but——

HELEN. And she's terrified by suspicions.

GERALD. Suspicions !

HELEN. Don't you see that she's had time to think of everything ? That telegram of yours said that you and Georgie were coming. It said nothing of Robert. You and Georgie ! Every horrible suspicion has been in her mind. Yes, Gerald, and in mine.

GERALD. What suspicions ?

HELEN. [*Clutching him.*] You didn't kill him, Gerald ? You didn't kill him ?

GERALD. [*He puts her away from him and sits down. He speaks weakly.*] Now, why—what makes you say that ?

HELEN. Don't be afraid of me, my dear. I can bear a good deal. I can understand a good deal.

GERALD. Wait a moment. I feel utterly exhausted.

HELEN. Don't be afraid of me.

GERALD. Look here. Isn't it better that you should know nothing ? I'll tell you the tale we've got to stick to.

HELEN. I'll have that presently. The truth.

GERALD. How did you know ? I mean—did I give it away ?

HELEN. I don't know. I seemed to be sure of it when I saw you standing there. Did she—was she—Georgie—— ?

GERALD. No, no.

HELEN. Well ?

GERALD. You don't think mother knows ?

HELEN. I think she knows, but she must never be told.

GERALD. She can't know.

HELEN. She doesn't want to.

GERALD. Helen, that's a hellish place. You can't judge of things here; you don't know what it is. The people there—English and scum of other nations—they've a kind of spurious heartiness. There's an awful conventional veneer over things—dreadful things. You know she sent for me—Georgie sent for me—and yet she was terrified when I came. I've brought her back. I've brought her away from it. I've done that.

HELEN. Why was she terrified?

GERALD. She was in the power of a brute—a degenerate beast.

HELEN. You mean——

GERALD. Robert.

HELEN. [*Passionately.*] You shall not speak so of Robert. I won't listen to you.

GERALD. He went to this place where every moral disease is rife. He accepted it all. What kind of disease? Cruelty, lust, avarice. He knew what it was, and he took her out there.

HELEN. You're bolstering up your case. Gerald, you must be fair. I loved Robert as well as you. There was a time when I liked him better. I won't listen to you if you speak of him like that.

GERALD. Well, call it disease. There was contagion in the air. The place reeked. I never drew a clean breath while I was there.

HELEN. Let's have the plain facts.

GERALD. The plain facts! But they're nothing.

You must understand my passion ; you must know how I hated him, and what cause I had—the inconceivable, infinite causes. Without that I'm only a murderer. I can't just tell you what happened. Fair? Be fair to me.

HELEN. I will, Gerald. I'll try.

GERALD. Oh, Helen ! I know how black it is. Poor Robert. No. That's infernally false. I throttle him in my dreams.

HELEN. Throttle?

GERALD. No, no.

HELEN. Come to it. Come to it.

GERALD. I'd only been there three days. Frankly, I didn't understand what terms we were on. I was trying to conciliate him for her sake. It was useless. He was very jovial sometimes. I tell you she was in a state of terror. I don't say he used physical violence to her. He played on her nerves through the poor devils he tortured.

HELEN. Oh, Gerald, have mercy!

GERALD. He was mad. Poor fellow ! He was mad. I do grant that, Helen. We must grant that. It had got into his blood.

HELEN. Tell me now. At once.

GERALD. We went out together in the morning. You go about with loaded rifles there, it seems. I thought he was trying to frighten me at first. He had a revolver, I think, and he carried a thick cane. There was a nigger—I don't think he had done anything wrong. It was to horrify me. He thrashed the man's bare body. I shouted at him, I remember.

My own voice exasperated me; there was something timid and scared in it that was maddening. We were both in a fury. I pointed the gun at him and he wouldn't stop. It was a trifle—whipping a nigger. *Millions* of cruelties and horrors were in it. I think—I'm not sure—that I thought of her. That may have been immediately afterwards. The awful joy and relief for her with him dead. Yes, I fired. I shot the vermin.

HELEN. You shot my brother.

GERALD. And mine. I can't get away from that. I've rehearsed every episode in our childhood. I've thought about him as he used to be, and that means thinking about you and mother. Then I've lashed myself to a fury again, just for relief.

HELEN. You went home and told her.

GERALD. No, I told her another story.

HELEN. Did she believe it?

GERALD. She didn't question it. And yet, as I told it, it was quite incredible.

HELEN. She pretends not to know?

GERALD. We haven't talked of that.

HELEN. It's strange.

GERALD. That made it possible. It was all strange.

HELEN. This man—the nigger—won't he tell?

GERALD. He's dead.

HELEN. What? You killed him?

GERALD. Then and there.

HELEN. Why?

GERALD. Because he saw it done.

HELEN. That's worse than the other—the other——

GERALD. Murder—yes, I suppose it is. He came fawning to me and I shot him. It seemed a trifle then.

HELEN. Go on. What happened? [*Hysterically.*] I wish you'd get done.

GERALD. I think you've had enough.

HELEN. There was a mutiny. Or, no—that was a lie?

GERALD. No, that's true. We had to fight for our lives. Helen, is there anything to drink here? I'm frightfully thirsty. Some water or something.

HELEN. I'll get you some. No, I can't do it now. Is there any more to say?

GERALD. More to say? I shall have to go on talking of this thing all my life and always picking my way.

HELEN. Does anybody know?

GERALD. Not a soul. I've been to the London office to report. It was just a revolt—whatever you like to call it—of the labourers. They were tremendously excited when they knew he was dead. They besieged us in the house. You may be sure that the company's people here don't want to talk too much about it. I brought her through.

HELEN. Now give me your tale—what you're going to say.

GERALD. [*He sits down suddenly.*] Wait a bit, Helen. [*HELEN looks at him for a little time and then goes to him and puts her arms about him. She sinks on her knees, and he buries his face in her breast. Then he raises his head.*] You'll help me, then?

HELEN. Yes.

[*She rises.*]

GERALD. I'm a bit confused. Is there anything I must do?

HELEN. [*Reflecting.*] We must get Georgie away as soon as possible.

GERALD. Georgie?

HELEN. She's a danger. I'm thinking of mother. She's rash. She might say something. Why did she come here? Why didn't she go home?

GERALD. Don't let her go—yet.

HELEN. Why not?

GERALD. Georgie has saved me.

HELEN. I thought you saved her.

GERALD. Ah! but she saved me.

HELEN. From what?

GERALD. Well—madness. Despair.

HELEN. But she must go now.

GERALD. I can't let her go.

HELEN. I don't understand you.

GERALD. You can't conceive what we've been through together.

HELEN. No.

GERALD. Or what she's been to me—and I to her.

HELEN. Well?

GERALD. There are times when I think it's been worth while—when I wouldn't have it otherwise.

HELEN. Think of what you're saying.

GERALD. Helen, I'm a better man than I was—a stronger man. She's mine now. Oh, there was a horrible, feverish time, but that passed. We loved

one another like children before. She left me. Nothing can part us now.

HELEN. You will part at once and for good.

GERALD. You said you'd help me.

HELEN. Yes, I'll help you. I'll help my mother too.

GERALD. I knew she wouldn't like it, but if you would persuade her——

HELEN. Wouldn't like it! A strict moderation of phrase.

GERALD. She'd do anything for my happiness.

HELEN. What right have you to happiness?

[GEORGIE enters.

GEORGIE. I can't stay away, Helen. You must let me come in.

HELEN. Yes. I suppose you'll have to go immediately.

GEORGIE. Go where?

HELEN. Home.

GEORGIE. Oh, yes. I ought to go to see them soon. I don't feel that I can yet.

HELEN. I think you had better go at once.

GEORGIE. Must I, Gerald?

GERALD. She's against us.

GEORGIE. Oh! But she can't be if she understands. Gerald and I have suffered. We came together. It's all different now. We love each other.

HELEN. I'm sorry for you. It's impossible.

GEORGIE. It can't be impossible. We love each other. You would never be so cruel—dear Helen.

HELEN. Do you know how your husband died?

GERALD. Stop.

HELEN. Do you know?

GEORGIE. My husband? Robert? All that's a dream that's past.

HELEN. It can never be past.

GEORGIE. Poor Robert's out of it.

HELEN. Listen to that, Gerald! Doesn't she put it charmingly?

GEORGIE. What do you mean? [*To GERALD.*]
What have you said to her?

HELEN. You know that he killed Robert.

GEORGIE. No. [*They confront one another.*] I don't care.

HELEN. You knew.

GEORGIE. It's different out there.

HELEN. Killing no murder?

GEORGIE. I don't care. That's past.

GERALD. Helen, you must rise to this. This is greater than you think. Everyday rules won't do. We've gone through terrible, wicked things. What I have passed through you can't—you can't——

HELEN. Passed through! You pass through such things! You come out on the other side?

GERALD. Georgie and I can be happy yet.

HELEN. And your mother?

GERALD. I know, I know. But mothers will do anything to make their children happy.

HELEN. There are two children concerned here.

GERALD. You mean——?

HELEN. Robert and you.

GEORGIE. Robert is dead.

HELEN. Tell her that.

GEORGIE. She is old. The old mustn't rule.

HELEN. You cruel, abominable woman. The old must be loved and cherished.

GERALD. Georgie is right. It's not for her to decide—or you——

HELEN. Are we to stand by and see another crime committed?

GERALD. There's no crime—it's nature. The circumstances are strange, but we just want to act naturally. Helen, we have passed through terrible things. We——

HELEN. Oh, you've said so. It's becoming a bore. I'm tired of it.

GERALD. Well, I suppose you have the whip hand. You can always denounce me. You can have me hanged. Would you do that?

HELEN. It will not be necessary.

GEORGIE. Oh, you're hard. You're a hard woman.

HELEN. I must be hard. I must keep hard.

GERALD. I can see the possibility of a tolerable life—a decent life—before me, and I can see blackness and despair. Which is it to be?

HELEN. Do you hear that, Georgie? A decent life! All this mighty passion is to come down to a tolerable life.

GEORGIE. It's your doing if he comes to harm.

HELEN. What harm?

GEORGIE. What does a man do when he's desperate?

HELEN. You profess to love him and you say that!

GERALD. And you were my affectionate sister once.

HELEN. Oh, you want things made easy. I shall come to despise you.

GERALD. Yes, I'm not fit to live. I'm a bloody dog that wants killing.

GEORGIE. I only wanted courage to do what you did.

GERALD. There, Helen! Let us go. We are made for one another. We two in the whole world. Can't you respect a great passion?

HELEN. No. I don't believe in you. I don't believe there's anything noble in your passion. I don't believe in its exclusiveness. You've got to act decently. You've got to think of others. All that is kind and good in the world is against you. You'd kill my mother. [*She listens.*] She's stirring above. She may be coming down. Take care.

GEORGIE. She doesn't know anything?

HELEN. Deep down in her heart she knows.

GEORGIE. Did she tell you so?

HELEN. I know her thoughts from my own. [*Suddenly.*] Gerald, you've never told me your story—the one you are to tell her. I must know.

GERALD. If she's coming there's no time now.

[*As they stand listening, Mrs. STRICKLAND enters.*]

HELEN. Now, mother, I told you to rest.

MRS. STRICKLAND. I didn't find it easy to rest.

HELEN. Well, sit down there.

[*Mrs. STRICKLAND takes a chair beside the table.*]

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*She speaks slowly and with much*

difficulty.] I've been thinking things over a little, Helen. Gerald was to tell us about poor Robert's death. I don't feel quite equal to—I think I might spare him—spare myself. Presently, perhaps. Why should I know? It's all very painful. Perhaps it's weak of me.

HELEN. No, mother. You're very wise.

MRS. STRICKLAND. Very well. No more of that at present. [*She reflects a little.*] Georgie will want to be getting home. [*They are all silent.*] Georgie, dear, I think you should go home.

GERALD. [*Glancing at HELEN.*] Mother, I have something to say to you that you may find very strange.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Nervously.*] Don't trouble me now.

[HELEN, behind her mother's chair, makes a warning gesture, which he disregards.]

GERALD. It's about Georgie.

HELEN. I think you had better not talk to mother now.

GERALD. Mother, Georgie and I have passed through— [*He falters, looking at HELEN again.*] We've had some dreadful experiences together. You know that we loved one another. Well, we are everything to one another now.

GEORGIE. He saved my life. He has been brave and noble. You want him to be happy.

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*She has stiffened as she listened to him.*] Say no more.

GERALD. Mother——

MRS. STRICKLAND. It's impossible.

GEORGIE. Why?

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*She is greatly agitated, but controls herself, maintaining some externals of calmness. She pauses before replying, and then addresses GERALD.*] You forget that she is your brother's wife.

GERALD. But, mother, that doesn't matter. Do you want me to be miserable all my life?

MRS. STRICKLAND. [*Fiercely.*] You shall not marry.

GERALD. If we do?

MRS. STRICKLAND. I will take the most extreme step to prevent it.

HELEN. [*After a pause.*] You must leave her now.

GERALD. We go together.

[*HELEN stands beside her mother, on one side of the table; GEORGIE and GERALD are at the other side. They confront one another for some seconds.*]

GEORGIE. [*Cries out.*] We can't do it. We can't do it.

GERALD. Yes.

GEORGIE. Look at them.

GERALD. Yes.

GEORGIE. I can't. I can't do it.

GERALD. You don't love me enough?

GEORGIE. Yes. Gerald, I might have changed. I shall love you always now. I shan't change now.

GERALD. It's you I want.

GEORGIE. Good-bye, my dear. Good-bye.

[GERALD looks intently at her, and then at his mother and HELEN, who are fixed relentlessly. He turns to GEORGIE again and they embrace suddenly, passionately, briefly. She walks out of the room without looking behind her. He watches her out, and then turns calmly to the others. His mother does not relax, but HELEN is shaken by sobs as the curtain descends; she does not cover her face.]

R E S E N T M E N T

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

BRENT

ANISE BRENT, *his wife*

DOCTOR

NURSE

SCENE: *A child's nursery—antechamber to his bedroom.*

A rocking-horse, a drum, etc., are in the nursery.

As the DOCTOR enters the NURSE comes out of the bedroom.

DOCTOR. Who is with the child?

NURSE. His mother.

DOCTOR. Why have you left him?

NURSE. I heard you coming upstairs and I wished to speak to you.

DOCTOR. What is it?

NURSE. Doctor, the mother never sleeps—she never relaxes. She'll be on your hands too.

DOCTOR. You should take it turn about.

NURSE. And it's not only that. Her husband—Mr. Brent—do you know that he has never been in the room?

DOCTOR. Why not?

NURSE. I think she keeps him out. It's a strange household. They hardly speak; there's something wrong between them. He's a nice gentleman enough. He comes up and stands outside and listens—for hours sometimes. He talks to himself.

DOCTOR. Now, you must not be too inquisitive. You must look after your own business.

NURSE. There's something wrong.

DOCTOR. Of course there's something wrong. They're high-strung, anxious people and their child is ill. How is he?

NURSE. His breathing is better; he's weaker, I think.

DOCTOR. Mrs. Brent manages all right? I mean, anything she has to do if you're not there?

NURSE. She's rather clumsy — shaky, you know. She's always ready and watching.

DOCTOR. Stay here for a minute, please. I'll call you if I want you.

[He goes into the bedroom. The NURSE settles into a chair and takes a book but sits listening. BRENT enters very quietly.]

BRENT. The Doctor's in there?

NURSE. Just gone in.

BRENT. How is he?

NURSE. No worse, I think.

BRENT. No better?

NURSE. There's not much change. You can't see a change every few minutes.

BRENT. True. I keep bothering you. One is anxious, of course. Have you nursed cases like this before?

NURSE. In hospital, I've seen them.

BRENT. Well, and do they get better?

NURSE. Sometimes.

BRENT. When they're like this—as bad as this, I mean? What do you think of it, now?

NURSE. You must ask the Doctor. I hope it'll be all right.

BRENT. Yes—yes, of course. You like children?

NURSE. I like them. Certainly I like them.

BRENT. He's a nice little chap if you could see him well.

NURSE. Oh! He's a dear little boy. He's lovely, even now.

BRENT. Is he, Nurse? Is he? What does he look like? Describe him.

NURSE. Oh! you mustn't make me cry.

BRENT. No, no. And do you ever get impatient—irritated—not with him—with others I mean? I suppose I shouldn't ask. Can you be always the same to children? It's absurd, you know, but that nurse's uniform seems to give a kind of assurance that you can't go wrong. Your conscience and your vigilance are always the same. You can't relapse; you can't neglect—or—or——

NURSE. I can make mistakes like everybody else, Mr. Brent.

BRENT. Mistakes! yes. Nurse, do you think it's possible for us to care too much about our children? To cherish them—to preserve them—to be always thinking of protecting them. Is this our selfishness? What? They must take their chance with the rest. [*He stops, listening.*] Was that the child?

NURSE. I heard nothing.

BRENT. No, there's nothing. I have a friend—a

bachelor, of course—who says that children should be brought up to play with razors on the edge of precipices—and with fire and water and gunpowder. Competent little beggars they'd be—those that were left.

NURSE. If the parents loved their children, how could they let them?

BRENT. No. But there's an idea in it. We mustn't be always thinking of their comfort. It's not fair to them.

NURSE. Would you do such things, Mr. Brent?

BRENT. I? Oh, I've another idea. I believe in reason. You can't begin too early. Make a child respect reason and act by reason. Having come to a decision, to act unswervingly—ruthlessly——

NURSE. Are you speaking of a child, Mr. Brent?

BRENT. Humph! Yes, I should like to hear what you think about it all. You always nurse children? I suppose you're a kind of expert—you have your views. Hark!

[MRS. BRENT and the DOCTOR come out of the bedroom.]

DOCTOR. You'd better go in, Nurse. [*Nurse goes.*]

MRS. BRENT. Well?

DOCTOR. I'm afraid he's not so well. It's critical, of course. The Nurse will do all that's possible.

BRENT. I should like to have a look at him.

[MRS. BRENT moves in front of the door. The DOCTOR looks at them curiously.]

BRENT. Doctor, let me ask you this. If you had been called in earlier—six hours—say six hours—would it have made any difference?

DOCTOR. I wish I had been called in earlier.

BRENT. I know—I know what you said when you first came. She told me. It was my fault—in-dolence—carelessness. My wife punishes me, you see. She won't let me see him. That is to say—I can't force myself in. Can you help us? Of course such an appeal is ridiculous, but we are not acting quite sanely. I have a kind of defence—I am not callous; I never was. I think I should be permitted to see my child.

DOCTOR. [*To MRS. BRENT.*] What do you fear?

MRS. BRENT. Fear?

DOCTOR. Why shouldn't your husband go in?

MRS. BRENT. Your attendance here is for a specific purpose, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Still, I happen to be here. [*A pause. He looks at his watch.*] If you will allow me I will go downstairs for half an hour. I'm ready if the Nurse should call me.

BRENT. Why must you stop?

DOCTOR. Well, I think I should like to look at him again presently.

MRS. BRENT. You'll have lunch. It's all ready, I think. Please ring the bell in the dining-room and tell them.

[*The DOCTOR bows and goes. MRS. BRENT is returning to the sick-chamber when BRENT speaks.*]

BRENT. Anise, I must speak to you. We can't go on like this.

MRS. BRENT. Speaking can do no good.

BRENT. Oh, call me a murderer and be done!

MRS. BRENT. Do you call yourself one?

BRENT. A man's own words won't hurt him. Listen to me. No—sit down—sit here. You asked me to go—to fetch the Doctor. Very well. I was indolent. I didn't want to be troubled—I didn't think he was ill. Remember that you have constantly worried about the child when there was nothing the matter. You must admit that—you must admit it. I had grown callous about your anxieties. I was to blame—I should have seen——

MRS. BRENT. You said that you would go.

BRENT. I did. I suppose I did. I said something of the kind. I forgot it. I half forgot it—I thought it was one of the false alarms——

MRS. BRENT. And you see now what you have done.

BRENT. Done! No—the point is this. If I had been neglectful so and nothing had happened—if it *had* been your whim—your foolish anxiety, if it had turned out that he wasn't ill, would you still have blamed me like this?

MRS. BRENT. He's dying.

[She is rising, but he forces her into the chair and stands over her.]

BRENT. If he is dying so much the more must you be just to me. I did wrong—a small wrong—I grant that. I admit it. It wasn't that I didn't love my

child. Do you see? You mustn't punish me like this. You mustn't judge by the consequences.

MRS. BRENT. God has judged it so.

BRENT. God! Dare you talk of such a God to me? And you believe that He arranged it all—He sees it all unfold? [*She rises and goes towards the bedroom. He prevents her and she submits sullenly.*] Listen to me. You must listen now to reason. Reason is the only thing that can help us. I am desperate except for reason. And I am afraid of losing that. I am losing that. See this with me. I feel that I am what you think me. I feel a murderer. I've sacrificed him. I've done it. He'll die—he's dying. I've done it. But listen: if I had known—it was not my sick child that I neglected—I never felt, I never knew that he was ill. You said so. You've said so a dozen times and there was nothing in it. [*His voice has risen. The NURSE appears at the door with a warning gesture. He motions her away and proceeds in a lower tone.*] You must be fair to me—to me. The child is not everything. It's my child. Your suffering is nothing to mine. You have your resentment; it's a luxury; it supports you. I have nothing—nothing. Reason! I meant to reason. I have faith in it. Listen.

[*She breaks away and enters the bedroom. The DOCTOR enters.*

DOCTOR. I heard your voices. I thought I might be wanted.

BRENT. Voices? Yes, Doctor, I was trying to reason with my wife. Women are damned unreason-

able, don't you think? They feel, you know. Intuitions, inspirations—all that kind of thing. My wife, now—she's an intelligent woman. In the ordinary affairs of life she reasons, of course—quite clearly and competently. There seems to be a limit; above a certain pressure of feeling, reason goes. It's the feminine nature, I suppose. But don't you think that when things are dreadful—when we're in despair—there's the more need for reason? Of course you do. I'm putting a platitude to you. Won't you go in and see how he's getting on?

DOCTOR. The nurse would call me if necessary.

BRENT. Every man among us has done something shocking and stupid and villainous. If you catch him at that and transfix him— [*He stops to listen.*] Did I hear? No. I hear the child a good deal, Doctor. She won't let me go in. Yes—if you take a man at his worst, if you take this lapse and judge him by that—it's unjust, it's monstrous. And if this lapse or mistake, or whatever it is, coincides—listen to this, I've got the idea—if it coincides with some great, awful calamity—must you judge him by that? [*Hysterically.*] Doctor, I keep thinking that I hear him.

DOCTOR. Come in with me to see him.

BRENT. I could force my way in, of course, but I won't. I accept this punishment. I deserve it. Do I? That's what I can't make out.

DOCTOR. You've done nothing, man. You are perfectly innocent. I really don't know what you are making a fuss about.

BRENT. Yes. You are very kind. [*He laughs.*] You treat me as slightly lunatic. The poor woman's life is bound up in her child. She can't care for it more than I do. These women say so. You know the idea. It's a part of them. They've given it suck. One has a respect for a reason based on physiology.

DOCTOR. Brent, if your delay in calling me in is at the bottom of all this, let me tell you that——

BRENT. Ah! yes. You want to be merciful, but you said—I know what you said when you first came.

DOCTOR. It's quite likely that it made no difference at all.

BRENT. Can you save him?

DOCTOR. Ah! That's doubtful. I'm afraid—I'm afraid.

BRENT. Poor thing! poor little beggar! Well—you're doing your best. Stay here! Don't miss a point. I don't think I dare look at him.

DOCTOR. Come in.

BRENT. Wait a moment. [*He goes to the door and speaks gently.*] Anise, Anise. [*MRS. BRENT comes out, quietly closing the door.*] Anise, how is he now?

MRS. BRENT. [*Looking at the DOCTOR.*] He hardly seems to breathe.

[*The NURSE appears and looks at the DOCTOR, who follows her into the room. MRS. BRENT is going, when her husband detains her.*]

BRENT. [*Humbly.*] Anise, do you think I might come in?

[She seems to hesitate. The NURSE appears again and beckons to her. MRS. BRENT goes in hastily. BRENT stands outside listening, hesitating. He paces about on tip-toe. He takes up the child's drum and the drumsticks, seats himself, and strikes the drum gently—rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub. The NURSE appears.]

NURSE. For heaven's sake, Mr. Brent——

[He starts, but continues to sit with the drum on his knees. She goes in. A pause. MRS. BRENT comes out.]

BRENT. I may go in now?

MRS. BRENT. Yes.

BRENT. He's dead, then?

MRS. BRENT. I suppose you'll never forgive me.

BRENT. Dead.

MRS. BRENT. I couldn't do anything else. You'll never forgive me.

BRENT. What did you say?

MRS. BRENT. That you'll never forgive me.

BRENT. Forgive! Oh, yes. That is to say—there's no question of forgiveness. These are matters of reason. There's a scientific explanation of everything. These things must be taken quietly and reasonably. *[He rises and puts down the drum.]*

[The DOCTOR enters.]

BRENT. Doctor, we are very grateful to you for your attention. I am sorry that you have had so

much trouble over the case. I suppose you will have to attend the inquest.

DOCTOR. Inquest ! There will be no inquest.

BRENT. I thought there was always an inquest after a murder.

MRS. BRENT. Edward !

DOCTOR. There is no question here of murder.

BRENT. True. But the impression is overpowering. I can't get it out of my head.

DOCTOR. Brent, you must pull yourself together. Go to your room and lie down for a little. I'll come to you there presently.

BRENT. Yes, I want to sleep. [*He goes.*]

DOCTOR. Mrs. Brent, I am not here to make impertinent comments. You share, with your husband, a great misfortune. If I may judge from appearances, he is in a serious condition.

MRS. BRENT. I am prepared to do my duty.

DOCTOR. Duty ! Yes. But duty should be tempered by sympathy——

MRS. BRENT. I have lost my child through him ; it was his doing. I am sorry for him when I see him now, but in my heart [*she strikes her heart*] how can I forgive ? Is he not a murderer ? He would not take the means to save the child.

DOCTOR. You are talking nonsense, madam. It is doubtful whether I could have done any good by coming earlier, and I may remind you that you have often sent for me on trivial occasions. At the worst his fault is trifling.

MRS. BRENT. How can I forgive ? You say it's an

unhappy chance and that's all. How can I blame a chance? My child lies in there——

[*Enter BRENT.*

BRENT. I have decided to give myself up to the police.

DOCTOR. For heaven's sake, Brent, don't be ridiculous. Why should you give yourself up to the police?

BRENT. [*Passes his hand over his face.*] You advise me not to do so?

DOCTOR. Advise you! My dear friend, you have done nothing wrong.

BRENT. You are mistaken. Of course it's absurd to talk about the police. My mind's not under control. Yes—yes, I remember now and I see clearly. It wasn't that I didn't go for you the other night. That was nothing; I explained that. Anise here, my wife, says it cost the child's life. No matter. That's nothing. There's worse than that.

DOCTOR. Now look here, Brent——

BRENT. Wait! I'll tell you.

DOCTOR. But I don't want to hear. You go back——

BRENT. Doctor, there are times when you must listen, and this is one of them. You can't get away from what I have to say. I'm like the ancient mariner and you can't escape. And it's interesting. You are a fool if this bores you. Do us the justice to admit that we are interesting. The child lies dead in there. She says I killed him, and she may be right.

It was not that trumpery matter of indolence or neglect when I didn't fetch you. That's nothing—nothing. Doctor, you know the old jokes about the husband and the crying child—the common facetious stock—you know the kind of thing—don't think I'm wandering—the middle of the night—Punch, you know—that sort of thing—the ridiculous father nursing the baby—the crying baby.

DOCTOR. Well—well—I want you just to get to bed—

BRENT. [*Sternly.*] You're mistaken. I'm talking to the point. Can't you see that? Well, I used to laugh with the rest, I suppose, but I've found out that a father trying to quieten his child in the night-time is not funny. It's not funny. Fathers and mothers have consented to accept the joke, but there is none. It's not amusing; it's terrible. You know, Anise.

MRS. BRENT. I know. Yes, I know that.

DOCTOR. Now, Brent, the sooner you dismiss all this kind of thing from your mind, the better.

BRENT. You're a fine, genial kind of fellow, Doctor, and you think we haven't any humour. But to a man who has nerves and craves the affection of his child this crying in the night is terrible. It provokes terrible thoughts—not thoughts—impulses—terrible, murderous impulses. I hated the child—the child?—or the cry? Here's a case for analysis. I hated him with that cry going on. It meant failure. He had no love for me. I was powerless and should always be powerless. All the failure of the coming years—the disappointments—disasters—all that was gracious

and acceptable in the child gone. And a dreadful antipathy between us. He struggled in my arms and shrieked more loudly. He hated me. I am not deficient in tenderness and care. I saw all the waste, the hopeless struggle to help him, to direct—to make him love me. It would be like that in all the years. I must thank God—I must be thankful—that I did him no violence. Not much—not much violence. You pretended that I was just rough, Anise, when I threw him down on the bed, and you sympathized with me then. Oh, you did more. Do you know what she did? Presently, she put him into my arms again. She was terrified. I saw it in her eyes, but she did that. Wasn't it noble? Wasn't it magnanimous? She must have loved me, then. How could I force myself into that room past her—a woman like that? But she won't forgive that little bit of neglect.

DOCTOR. My dear chap, you mustn't—you really mustn't take all this so seriously.

BREN . I'm not a well-balanced man, though. Do you remember, Anise—you won't remember—that you noticed I hadn't shaved when we breakfasted that morning? A small, domestic detail, Doctor. Well, I was afraid of my razor. A man with a razor in his hand is very close to death.

DOCTOR. Mrs. Brent, I can do nothing here and you will do nothing.

MRS. BRENT. Let him speak.

BRENT. Yes, let me make my point. Do you see it? I forget for the moment whether I got to it.

DOCTOR. Don't trouble about it now.

BRENT. Oh, don't treat me as a child. I may be mad, but I am a man.

DOCTOR. What is the point?

BRENT. I am not a murderer. No. There's nothing for a jury, of course. That's absurd. But in the sight of God—I can't stop to argue about God—let's say God— The child was in my arms and I was mad. I might have—I might—I might—I might—I was tormented. I threw him on the bed. I did nothing. I didn't harm him. But he's dead. You see the point? It's not cause and effect—not as we understand them. When you come to our kind of cause and effect it's some little trivial thing that matters; I didn't go to fetch you when I ought to have done. Isn't it horrible to think that there are real causes?

DOCTOR. Well, you may be stating a new moral law, but you won't persuade me that you had any murderous passion. Your child is dead. You may blame my incapacity if you like; you may blame a hundred things, and yourself among them.

[He stops, seeing that they are not listening to him. The NURSE comes to the door and MRS. BRENT goes to her. They retire into the bedroom.]

BRENT. Yes, I've thought it all over fifty thousand times. I suppose not far short of a million times. And the strange thing is I can go on thinking—yes, and talking—talking—and he's dead. He lies in there, dead,

DOCTOR. Pull yourself together.

BRENT. For what purpose?

DOCTOR. Purpose? You're a man. You've the world before you.

BRENT. What's to be done? The child's dead.

DOCTOR. Oh! Get another child.

BRENT. What a frightful suggestion! And to go through it all again.

DOCTOR. Weren't you happy? Your married life has been happy enough.

BRENT. But that was in ignorance. We didn't know what it held for us. We had not been tried. You can't turn back to all the freshness and the happy chances.

DOCTOR. Your wife will change. She will see that she has been—unreasonable.

BRENT. Oh, yes. That's likely enough! I'm rather fearing it.

[MRS. BRENT *enters with the* NURSE.

MRS. BRENT. Edward, will you come in with me?

BRENT. Come in? With you?

MRS. BRENT. Yes. Before you, Doctor, and you, Nurse, I want to say that I have failed in my duty.

BRENT. That's handsome.

MRS. BRENT. I shall not fail again. In all things now I am your faithful, obedient wife.

[*She turns and goes toward the bedroom door, when she pauses.*

BRENT. You see, Doctor. Restitution of conjugal

rights and all. [*He laughs.*] Oh, it's horrible, horrible!

DOCTOR. You talk about reason. Let that guide you.

BRENT. Yes. I cling to that. I don't want to go mad. And, of course, all's well. I've a dutiful wife and, as you say, the world's before us. It's a pity the poor little chap died, but we can't help that. Yes, let's have a look at him. Come, Anise.

[*MR. and MRS. BRENT go into the bedroom.*
The DOCTOR and NURSE stand listening as the curtain falls.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS

SIR FRANK SELBY, BART., F.R.S.

LADY SELBY

DR. RUSHTON

DICKINSON

SCENE: SIR FRANK SELBY'S study, late at night.

SIR FRANK is writing alone. He finishes a sheet and lays it on others, puts down his pen, stretches himself, looks at his watch, stares at it incredulously.

SIR FRANK. By Jove!

[He arranges papers rather hurriedly, then stops to listen. There is a knock at the door.

DICKINSON enters with whisky, etc., which he places on a table.

SIR FRANK. Ah! Dickinson.

DICKINSON. You didn't ring, Sir Frank, but as it is late I thought it best to bring——

SIR FRANK. Quite right, Dickinson. What time do you make it?

DICKINSON. [Consults his watch.] I should call it about ten minutes to twelve, sir.

SIR FRANK. I didn't hear Lady Selby come in.

DICKINSON. She has not yet returned, sir.

SIR FRANK. Oh! I forget for the moment where she went. Let me see—do you happen to know, Dickinson?

DICKINSON. I think it was to dine at Mr. Cadwalader's, sir.

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SIR FRANK. Ah! to be sure—Cadwallader's. [*To himself.*] I really should have gone. I must get about more now. I must— Dickinson, how many can we dine comfortably, do you think?

DICKINSON. Well, Sir Frank, I should say sixteen's the limit. Twelve 'd be a better number, if I may say so, sir. You see we haven't had much practice lately, and I'm thinking of the waiting.

SIR FRANK. Yes—well—I'll talk to Lady Selby about it; it's time we did something of the kind. I'm getting a recluse; I must go out more. And I shall have more time now. Yes, Dickinson, I wish I could have my father here to show him— [*He indicates the MS. on the desk.*] It's what he would have hoped for. Well—the work's done and we'll make a bit of stir in the world. How long have you been with us, Dickinson?

DICKINSON. Five-and-thirty years, Sir Frank—twenty-nine with your father, six with you; and if I may say so, sir, I hope I shall never see any other service.

SIR FRANK. Ah! I hope not—I hope not, indeed. Quiet people, quiet people, aren't we? Nothing very exciting in this household. You said that Lady Selby had not returned?

DICKINSON. Not yet, sir.

SIR FRANK. [*Looking at his watch.*] Humph! Thank you. I don't think you need sit up. [*Distant electric bell.*] Ah, what's that? She would have her latchkey.

DICKINSON. Lady Selby didn't take her latchkey, sir.

SIR FRANK. Why not?

DICKINSON. I don't know, sir. It was on the hall table.

SIR FRANK. Forgot it, no doubt. Well—there she is.

[*Exit* DICKINSON.]

[SIR FRANK *advances to the door to listen.*
Comes back slowly to the middle of the room.

SIR FRANK. What the deuce——

[*Enter* RUSHTON.]

SIR FRANK. Ah! Rushton, it's you.

RUSHTON. Yes, and rather late, even for me. [*He looks quickly about him.*] Lady Selby—has Lady Selby come—gone to bed?

SIR FRANK. Here!—Come and have some whisky.

RUSHTON. Thanks — no — yes, I will. Lady Selby——

SIR FRANK. What's the matter with you? Soda? Dickinson can soon fetch some Apollinaris?

RUSHTON. Lady Selby is at home?—has returned? I met her to-night at the Cadwallader's.

SIR FRANK. Why do you ask, Rushton? What's the matter?

RUSHTON. Frank, you leave your wife too much alone. [*He looks at his watch.*] Is she here?

SIR FRANK. Of course she's here—that is, she went to bed half an hour ago.

RUSHTON. Ah! — pray forgive me — excuse me. [*Settles down in a chair with whisky, cigarette, etc.*] Well, it's a chance to talk to you. Why didn't you come to-night?

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SIR FRANK. To the Cadwallader's? Well, I haven't been going out, as you know. I believe I had accepted this, but yesterday I excused myself. They're decent people; they allow me to be rather casual. Anyone I know there?

RUSHTON. Your wife.

SIR FRANK. Yes—yes. Of course.

RUSHTON. Asher was there.

SIR FRANK. Asher? Is he a friend of theirs?

RUSHTON. I think they got him to take your place at the last moment. Perhaps Lady Selby suggested him.

SIR FRANK. I think not. I don't think she cares much for Asher.

RUSHTON. They seem to get on very well together.

SIR FRANK. Oh! Really?

RUSHTON. And they see a good deal of one another.

SIR FRANK. Yes?

RUSHTON. Too much.

SIR FRANK. What do you mean by that?

RUSHTON. I've had it in my mind to speak to you for some time. Yes, you leave your wife too much alone. I put it bluntly. Damn it! Frank, you neglect her. It's not fair. People talk about it, and it's not fair to her. It's time you knew. There are rumours—suspicions. You know I like her and admire her very much. But a woman must live—remember that she's living intensely all the time. And the better she is the less she guards herself. You know what men are. Of course, you're a great scientific man; you're going strong, and this particular job

seems to have absorbed you. It's time you woke up.

SIR FRANK. You speak of suspicions. Of what kind?

RUSHTON. The usual kind.

SIR FRANK. There's a name—there's a man—what?

RUSHTON. I've mentioned his name.

SIR FRANK. Asher! [*He gets up and moves restlessly about the room as he speaks.*] Rushton, you do my wife a great wrong. I don't mean to suggest that you believe anything of this shameful—this preposterous suggestion; but to speak of Asher— Ah! but I know I'm to blame. I know all that. You can't say anything too severe to me. Curiously, it came on me to-night. I've behaved badly. I've been abominably cruel and callous, I see. This thing has been a great preoccupation. [*He indicates his MS.*] As you know, I've had to make innumerable experiments, to forestall every objection. I don't want to excuse myself, but you must understand. It possessed my mind. It's incredible, but I haven't had time to think of her. I suppose I've known that things were wrong all these months. I've not been fair; no, but this has claimed me. After all, it's my work—this is my life—here's my place in the world. And it has been terribly hard—things went wrong continually. I was sure of my point—I knew that I was right—but the laborious, wearisome experiments, the repetitions—you've not tried this kind of thing; you can hardly know what it is. And one's in a hurry; it's childish,

it's despicable—but one wants to be first. Ah! I've been wrong. I reproach myself bitterly. Poor girl! Rushton, if you'll believe me, I have—yes, I have thought of her through all this. It seems absurd—I've neglected her, but I had her in my mind all the time. The honour, the distinction of the thing—I wanted to give her that. I knew we were falling apart. I'm not so blind, but I wasn't free. The thing was too big, Rushton. I mean I couldn't take on a great emotion—a distraction. Basely, I let us go slipping downhill. I'm fully conscious of it now. Well, that's over. I've finished, and I'm confident. Look here—[*he brandishes the MS.*]*—here's my paper for the Royal Society. It's finished—I finished it to-night. Now there's nothing between us. Now for the glory and the fun. Now—[he stops and pulls out his watch]*—where can she have gone?

RUSHTON. Who?

SIR FRANK. Sophy.

RUSHTON. What do you mean?

SIR FRANK. She's late. She's out. Where can she have gone?

RUSHTON. You're mad. What do you mean? You said she had gone to bed.

SIR FRANK. I did say so—I remember—yes. It's absurd—it's childish. I suppose it was a kind of joke. No, you annoyed me. I didn't like your inquiries—your persistence. It seemed like a reflection on my wife. So I lied—I lied. Yes, Rushton, it was a lie. A strange impulse—and it was ridiculous

when she might come in at any moment. I wonder where——

RUSHTON. [*Interrupting him.*] But—but—do you mean, do you really mean that your wife has not come home?

SIR FRANK. She has not come home.

RUSHTON. [*Throws up his arms.*] Oh, what monstrous folly! What madness has taken you? [*He pulls out his watch.*] By heavens! there may be time. A hansom—is Dickinson up? Dickinson! Dickinson!

SIR FRANK. What's this? What are you up to?

[*Enter* DICKINSON.

RUSHTON. Dickinson—a hansom—quick. Don't lose a moment. Off you go— [*Exit* DICKINSON *hurriedly.*] I'll explain as we go. Come on.

SIR FRANK. What is it? Tell me what it is or I won't go. I'm waiting here for my wife. I want to see her.

RUSHTON. Your wife! That's it. It's to catch her—stop her.

SIR FRANK. Where? How?

RUSHTON. Come on. Your coat?

SIR FRANK. No. What is it. Tell me in a word.

RUSHTON. She's leaving you—she's running away. Euston—the North train. Good heavens! I heard the appointment made. I thought it was so. Why didn't I— Come on. Here's Dickinson. [*Enter* DICKINSON.] Where's your master's coat and hat? Quick.

DICKINSON. The hansom's here. [*Exit* DICKINSON.

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SIR FRANK. Stop! You heard the appointment made. With whom?

RUSHTON. Asher.

SIR FRANK. By God! you lie. You lie, Rushton. It's shameful——

RUSHTON. Come.

SIR FRANK. Never.

[*Enter DICKINSON with coat and hat.*

RUSHTON. Put them down and leave us. [*Exit DICKINSON.*] Selby, you know me to be your friend. There's yet time. You may regret this to your dying day. I tell you I overheard—it was as I left the Cadwallader's—they were together in the hall. I didn't understand—I didn't realize—then. I've been puzzling and hesitating. Then I came here. You told me she was in—you told me so—Heaven knows why. If she's not—then I tell you that she leaves by the 12.30 from Euston—with Asher.

SIR FRANK. People don't run away North.

RUSHTON. Oh Frank, Frank! don't be a fool. Come on.

SIR FRANK. I won't go.

RUSHTON. You must go.

SIR FRANK. Rushton, if you were a woman and your husband set off in pursuit because you were half an hour late in coming home, what would you do?

RUSHTON. You forget that I heard them.

SIR FRANK. You were mistaken. You didn't hear—you didn't know. You pieced it together afterwards. It's not true. Asher! I won't offer

her this monstrous affront. [*He paces about the room and his eye catches the photograph on his desk. He takes it up.*] Ah, here's her photograph. Have a look at it.

RUSHTON. [*Looks at his watch.*] I beg of you, Frank, by all that you hold sacred, to come with me. Of course I'll get out short of Euston.

SIR FRANK. [*Looking at the photograph.*] I will not.

RUSHTON. Then you've lost your wife.

SIR FRANK. No.

RUSHTON. [*Grasps his shoulder.*] You're mad, Frank, you're mad with some frightful form of self-conceit.

SIR FRANK. You mean well, Billy Rushton, or I'd throw you out of the window. You tell me that she [*he holds out the photograph*] has run away with Asher. These are strange words to be uttered in this room. Well, I say she has not. She couldn't do it—it's impossible. I deserve it. I deserve all I got. I'm a selfish, cruel brute. If she left me I won't say that it would be wrong—only—she couldn't do that.

RUSHTON. She has done it, you fool.

SIR FRANK. Then it's over. I'll not pursue her.

RUSHTON. I will. [*He moves toward the door.*]

SIR FRANK. Stop! I forbid you to do anything of the kind.

RUSHTON. Forbid me!

SIR FRANK. Yes——

RUSHTON. And why?

SIR FRANK. She shall not be insulted. I believe in her. I trust her.

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RUSHTON. You don't.

SIR FRANK. You lose my friendship if you go.

RUSHTON. I begin to doubt the value of your friendship. You would sacrifice your wife for some poor shred of dignity.

SIR FRANK. No—no, Billy. You're wrong. I'm not so bad as that. No—I'm not so bad as that.

RUSHTON. Come, then.

SIR FRANK. No.

[*He sits down by the desk. RUSHTON looks at him over his shoulder as he hurries out.*]

RUSHTON. [*Outside.*] Now, Dickinson, is that hansom there?

SIR FRANK. [*Alone.*] Oh, misery!

[*He stands hesitating, looks at his watch, his eyes stray to the photograph. He goes up to the desk and fumbles with his papers. He leans his head on his hands. Suddenly he starts up and struggles into his coat. A ring below. He goes to the door and listens. He takes off his coat hastily and throws it down, then removes coat and hat to an inconspicuous place. He stands looking anxiously at the door. LADY SELBY enters.*]

SIR FRANK. Ah! it's you, Sophy. [*He is advancing towards her, but she stops, and he hesitates.*] And how late—how late you are, my dear. You went on somewhere after the Cadwallader's? We've been quite alarmed.

LADY SELBY. We?

SIR FRANK. [*He attempts to relieve her of her cloak, but she evades him.*] We? Ah! well, Dickinson is quite one of the family.

[*Foiled in his attempt to assist her, he bends to kiss her hand. She snatches it away. He falls back, looking at her.*]

LADY SELBY. Has anyone been here?

SIR FRANK. Rushton called in for a few minutes.

LADY SELBY. Dr. Rushton! What did he say? Tell me—tell me! What did he come for? What did he say? Where is he now? It doesn't matter. You have to know everything; there's no disguise now. We've come to the end. This is the end, Frank. [*She sits down.*]

SIR FRANK. The end? It's only the beginning—I don't understand you. Good heavens! Sophy—what do you mean? But let me speak. I must speak. Rushton—yes, I'll tell you. He called in—you'll forgive him—to—well—to remonstrate with me. I've neglected you, he says; I leave you too much alone. It's true. He was at the Cadwallader's to-night, wasn't he? A good fellow—Rushton. Now don't be angry with him. He's a good fellow—a kind fellow, and he's right—in this he's right. He's capable of extraordinary misjudgment—the poor old chap can make mistakes with any man; but I have—I have—my dear— [*He approaches her and she repulses him with a gesture.*] What is it! You have to forgive me. Yes, I've been incredibly foolish. I've neglected you. And to neglect you. What madness! What misery and folly! I believe that I

care for nothing in the world but you—there is nothing else. And yet—this work of mine. [*He points to the desk.*] Yes—that counts, too. But, remember, this was a special case. My reputation, my worldly life was in this—and a deep interest. It was a tremendous absorption. I couldn't share it with you, Sophy. It's over—that is to say—I must be honest—it can never be over—but this particular work is done. I've done this job, and what a relief! Here's my paper written, finished—for the Royal Society, you know. And—let me tell you—honour—glory await us. Dreiser and Holden are with me now. My hypothesis has become a certainty. Ah, yes, I've thought of you—and you've helped me. The woman needn't understand. My dear, you needn't understand. Yet I dedicate it to you. You inspire—you—yes, and there's the strangeness of my folly. I never came to you, then. Well, it was a desperate, harassing preoccupation, and I—Forgive me.

LADY SELBY. Oh, I can't listen to all this. How much do you know?

SIR FRANK. How much——

LADY SELBY. Dr. Rushton has been here. What did he tell you? He knows—he knows something. I have to speak—I have to confess. What do you know? You may spare me something.

SIR FRANK. Rushton? Yes—he scolded me, he gave me a good talking to. What do you mean, Sophy? What is it? Well, then, he did—yes, he made an extraordinary scene. He spoke about you,

and we quarrelled—hardly a quarrel—and he's an old friend. It made me wretched and agitated—nothing more.

LADY SELBY. But he was explicit—surely—it's useless to disguise it. He mentioned a man's name.

[*A short pause.*]

SIR FRANK. Yes, he did. Sophy, let it rest there. I needn't say that I trust you. You are here. I want nothing more. Poor Rushton will regret it bitterly.

LADY SELBY. What folly! Trust me!

SIR FRANK. Yes—trust you.

LADY SELBY. Ah, yes—the point of honour. You're always the chivalrous gentleman. What's the good of it? You know in your heart——

SIR FRANK. No—no——

LADY SELBY. Well—your trust is misplaced. Frank, will you speak plainly? Will you tell me what Dr. Rushton said?

SIR FRANK. [*After a pause*]. He said that you had gone—gone away—that you had given an assignation—at Euston—for the 12.30 North.

LADY SELBY. Well?

SIR FRANK. He wanted me to pursue you. There was time.

LADY SELBY. And you——

SIR FRANK. No—I've not come to that.

LADY SELBY. You would let me go?

SIR FRANK. I knew that you would not.

LADY SELBY. But if I did?

SIR FRANK. You are here.

LADY SELBY. I did go—I did. I'm here—that's true. But you see—you know. It's all true. Dr. Rushton suspected? He knew? He's your good friend. [I did say that I would go, I meant to go. Nay—nay—I went. I met him there. Yes, I left you. I'm the runaway wife—I left you. It's all over. I left you.

SIR FRANK. But you're here.

LADY SELBY. I'm here—yes. I don't know why. It's a kind of accident. These things happen anyhow; we don't control them. I shall never forget the gloomy horror of that station! The discomfort and misery of it! No, Frank, I couldn't do it—but I'm not the better for that. This poor boy—he's the one that's hardly used. He's passionate—he's not bad. He would do anything—he touched me. But I didn't love him. I was sorry for him—and for myself. I wished—I wish that I could have had a passion, too. I wanted something to sweep me away, but it didn't, and I came home—ridiculously. I wanted something. One can't live on resentment—and resentment isn't hatred. I never hated you. I tried to—I thought I did. We drifted apart. I couldn't bear it. I should have spoken—appealed. I couldn't do that. If we had had children——

SIR FRANK. [*After a pause.*] This man—this boy, as you call him—Asher—where is he?

LADY SELBY. I left him there. I broke from him. No—I couldn't do it. I was cowardly. I was afraid of him. I couldn't see myself doing that. It wasn't that I thought of you.

SIR FRANK. Asher! A sullen, fantastic youth. I'm made of common clay, you see. I'm ready to fly at the fellow's throat. Ah, Sophy, it's a miserable business. You are not to blame—I a thousand times more, at least. But how could you— Well, it's past. You never spoke to me; you never told me. You should have given me a chance. It's over now. I beg for your forgiveness.

LADY SELBY. You think so? You think it's over? All this is to be wiped clean away? Ah, if I could think so. It's impossible; I have suffered too much. I came back—yes. I had nowhere else to go—and I must face you—and I knew I should be safe with you—I knew that. But to-morrow—I must go.

SIR FRANK. No—never——

LADY SELBY. I left you. Do you think I did it easily?—that it meant nothing? What? A little kindness together—kiss and be friends? You forget—you forget the sin and misery that lies between us. I brooded over this long in secret. I saw you going further and further away from me. I've had bad thoughts—I've been wicked—wicked. Can I come back like this? It can't be so easy. Some expiation— And what to do—I don't know what to do. I can go away and clash the front door after me all right, but what then? We're not like those people on the stage. We have to go on living.

SIR FRANK. But it's over. We see clearly; we repent, we begin again.

LADY SELBY. Begin again? And I remember

hearing you say that the one thing impossible in this world is to begin again.

SIR FRANK. Ah! yes—a philosophical platitude.

LADY SELBY. That the consequences of our actions go on for ever—nothing can be wiped out.

SIR FRANK. True—true enough. It means nothing—the consequences here are not disastrous. We have our lesson. I have mine, I know.

LADY SELBY. And there's another person. It's shame to me to speak of him. He's left out of account. We are to be happy here. What of him? How can I be happy?

SIR FRANK. Ah! that headstrong youth. Can the consequences to him be very serious? If you had cared for him—if you loved him——

LADY SELBY. The horror of it is that I did not.

SIR FRANK. Thank God! Anything but that. Don't you see that we are saved?

LADY SELBY. It's all dark and terrifying to me. Then all this wretchedness—all this evil—and we can stop and settle down again, and there's no harm done? No result? I feel that it's impossible—yet I want to be happy again. I want to be comfortable. Can it be?

SIR FRANK. We love one another. It's not too late. We come together. The burden of it may lie on us for a time—it may be better that it should be so. Our punishment is not too great. Nay, I feel that there is no punishment. It's a merciful world—a merciful God if you like. We were on the brink of a great disaster. It's evaded.

LADY SELBY. Well—you haven't ceased to love me—that's the great thing. Yes, I'll believe it—I want to believe it. All that is an episode, and it's past—it's ended. Ah! I desire happiness—safety at least.

SIR FRANK. Dear heart, you are safe; you shall be happy.

[As she yields to his embrace a pistol-shot is fired in the street.]

LADY SELBY. What's that? Frank, what's that?

SIR FRANK. It's nothing. Queer, though. A shot in the street. It seemed to be nearly under the window.

LADY SELBY. What can it be? Ah! see what it is. Hark! *[Ringing—repeated quickly several times at the door-bell.]* Don't go, Frank. Don't go. Oh, what is it? *[She clings to him.]*

SIR FRANK. Don't be alarmed, dear. Dickinson is there—but I must go to see what it is.

[He hurries out.]

LADY SELBY. Don't go. Oh, don't go!

[Alone—she half collapses—then listens with rigid attention. DICKINSON enters hastily—sees her and backs away.]

LADY SELBY. Dickinson—Dickinson! *[He comes forward reluctantly.]* What is it? What's the matter? Who is it?

DICKINSON. *[Confused.]* Something in the street, my lady—an accident.

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LADY SELBY. What? What? Speak. Who is it? Who is shot?

DICKINSON. A young man passing—an accident. Dr. Rushton is calling me.

LADY SELBY. [*Drags him forward.*] Tell me who it is.

DICKINSON. It's the young gentleman who—it's Mr. Asher.

LADY SELBY. Ah! I knew. He's dead?

DICKINSON. Oh, my lady! dead or dying, Dr. Rushton said. [*He breaks off and hastens out.*]

LADY SELBY. And he would do that! Oh, what folly! What misery! What misery! [*Enter RUSHTON.*] What! He's dead?

RUSHTON. [*Hesitates.*] Lady Selby, there has been an accident in the street. A man has been shot and——

LADY SELBY. An accident! He's dead?

RUSHTON. He's dead.

LADY SELBY. Of course he's dead. I knew that. He shot himself at our door. He lies at our door. He'll lie there for ever.

RUSHTON. With your permission—he must be brought in—Dickinson will see about a room.

[*Enter SELBY.*]

LADY SELBY. Ah! Frank. We have a guest, it seems. What room shall we put him in?

SIR FRANK. [*To RUSHTON.*] She knows?

RUSHTON. [*To SELBY.*] I've not told her.

SIR FRANK. Sophy, for God's sake try to be calm—

try to help us—to help me. You know? I see you know. It's terrible. It's a punishment too great for us——

LADY SELBY. For us! And for him? Was it in the head? Where?

SIR FRANK. Ah! poor fellow—wretched hound! No—it's not for us to judge. It's a sad end—a miserable end. What's the use of this rotten talk? [*He sits down, and almost immediately gets up.*] What to do? There's nothing to be done. Rushton—what do we do next? We can't go to bed. We can't stay here. Eat! Drink! What does one do?

LADY SELBY. [*Goes to the desk. Flourishes the MS.*] Here! You have this. Ah! yes. Now read us your paper. It will serve to pass the time. We'll be the Royal Society. Come, Dr. Rushton—we're the audience. What's it all about? Cause and effect? That's science. Every cause must have its effect—you can't escape the consequences of your actions. His body's in the house.

SIR FRANK. My God! I can't stand this.

RUSHTON. Lady Selby, you have a great trial to bear—together. Think of your husband in this—as he will think of you.

SIR FRANK. Ah! Sophy.

[*He gently disengages the MS. from her hands and lays it carefully on the desk. She sees this and laughs.*]

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LADY SELBY. Yes, you're all right. You'll soon be at work again. What's that? Listen! There are feet on the stairs. [*They all stand listening.*] To our room, Frank—to our room—to our bed—he'll lie between us.

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